

The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina

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Today the structures stand almost forgotten, scattered across the North Carolina countryside. Some are now houses, businesses, or barns. Others -- particularly those that stand next to churches as community halls -- still retain the large banks of windows that mark them as school buildings. These are Rosenwald Fund schools, landmarks in the history of African American education.

Conceived in the 1910s by black educator Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee Institute staff, the Rosenwald program represented a massive effort to improve black rural schooling in the South through public-private partnership. The name came from philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Rosenwald offered matching grants to rural communities interested in building black schools.¹ Washington and Rosenwald hoped not only to improve black school facilities but also to promote black-white cooperation in those dark days of Jim Crow and spur southern localities to increase support for black education.

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¹ The only full-length book on the Rosenwald Fund is Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of The Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), hereinafter cited as Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*. For a brief overview of the fund in the context of philanthropic aid to southern education, see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 396-406, hereinafter cited as Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, and George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 268-272, hereinafter cited as Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*.

In the short run, the Rosenwald Fund had an impressive effect. By the early 1930s thousands of old shanty schoolhouses had been replaced with new, larger structures constructed from modern standardized plans. Over 5,300 Rosenwald buildings blanketed fifteen southern states.² More were erected in North Carolina than in any other state. Through a combination of active leadership in the state Department of Public Instruction and enthusiastic fund raising by blacks at the grass-roots level, North Carolina constructed over 800 Rosenwald buildings.

While the Rosenwald effort dramatically improved black rural school facilities, the program did not have the far-reaching impact that its originators envisioned. Rosenwald grants and black "volunteerism" at the local level proved no match for the attitudes of southern whites. School boards continued to let public investment in black education lag ever further behind that in white schools. The Rosenwald Fund shut down its school building program in 1932 and turned to other avenues to promote interracial cooperation. The problem of school inequality would not begin to crack until a generation later, under pressure from a very different strategy. Starting slowly in the 1950s with the United States Supreme Court decisions *Sweatt v. Painter* and *Brown v. Board of Education* and accelerating through the 1960s and into the 1970s, African American activists and white liberals brought the power of the United States government to bear on southern school boards.

This essay explores North Carolina's experience with the Rosenwald school building program. It takes as a case study Mecklenburg County, where black farmers won grants to construct twenty-six of the new schools. Mecklenburg is of interest not only as a representative Rosenwald county, but also because the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) inaugurated court-ordered busing of public school students to achieve racial balance.

Public education for African Americans in North Carolina began in the 1860s at the impetus of the federal government. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau), established in March 1865, to assist former slaves, started dozens of schools throughout the state during the Civil War and Reconstruction.³ After 1868 local communities gradually took up the task of public schooling for both whites and blacks. In Mecklenburg County, for example, black schools stood in each rural township by 1871, and in 1874 the county had thirty-

² Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 51.

³ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Random House, third edition, 1969), 308-309, hereinafter cited as Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*; Joe A. Mobley, *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina, 1863-1900* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1981), 29-30. The Freedmen's Bureau ended its educational work in 1869.

four schools for Negroes and forty-six for whites.⁴ Cities like Charlotte sometimes built "graded schools" with separate rooms for each grade. But in the countryside, schools were one-room facilities.

Poverty and localism were the overriding factors in southern rural education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as historian William Link has pointed out in his recent study of Virginia.⁵ Americans believed that schooling was the business of the local community, and the local community alone. Except for the short-lived Freedmen's Bureau, the federal government took no direct part in local education, and the states offered only minimal support.

The impact of poverty and localism fell hard on white farm children, even harder on blacks. School terms were short, and public instruction rarely extended beyond the elementary grades for white children and never for blacks. Teachers were often very young, with only a bit more education than their charges. While money might be found for a new schoolhouse for whites, the typical black school was an old abandoned white school, a rotting cabin, or even a corncrib.

A glimpse of North Carolina's rural black schools in that early era may be seen in the Mecklenburg County diaries of young Charles W. Chesnutt. Chesnutt, who grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina, taught in the Charlotte area for several years before moving to the North where he won fame as one of America's earliest black novelists.⁶ In July 1874, barely past his eighteenth birthday, Chesnutt was called to teach summer school in the Mecklenburg countryside. "At Moore's sanctuary he was told that people had used up the school funds in building a schoolhouse and had no money left for a teacher," according to an early biographer of Chesnutt.⁷ Other

⁴ Daniel A. Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte from 1740 to 1903* (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1903), 166; Janette Thomas Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, 1850-1920: A Teaching Packet for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Teachers* (Charlotte: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1984), section 3, p. 31, hereinafter cited as Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg*.

⁵ William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), hereinafter cited as Link, *A Hard Country*. See also George R. Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 4-6, hereinafter cited as Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston*.

⁶ *North Carolina Authors: A Selective Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 19-20. See also Richard Walser, assisted by E. T. Malone, Jr., *Literary North Carolina: A Historical Survey, Revised and Enlarged* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, second edition, 1986), 24-26; Helen M. Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Prisoner of the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), hereinafter cited as Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*.

⁷ Chesnutt, Charles Waddell *Ch tt 8 11' I* 1874-1876, Charles Waddell, 8-11; see also the Charles Chesnutt Journal, Volume I, 1874-1876, Charles W. Chesnutt Collection, Special Collection, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee, hereinafter cited as Chesnutt Journal.

disappointments at Morrow's Turnout and Rockwell Church (later a Rosenwald Site) led him to search out a school in "a church called Jonesville or Jonahville" in the Mallard Creek area. "By dint of stopping and inquiring at every house," he recalled, "and by climbing fences and crossing cotton fields, I arrived at Jonesville. Where the 'ville' was I am not able to say, for there was but one house within nearly a half mile of the 'church.' The church itself was a very dilapidated log structure, without a window: but there was no real need of one, for the cracks between the logs furnished a plentiful supply."⁸

Mecklenburg County records listed additional schools during the 1880s and 1890s, but for black children the situation remained much as Chesnutt had found it. Black rural education was sorely substandard. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one in five white North Carolinians grew to adulthood without learning to read. Among blacks the illiteracy rate was one in two.⁹

Around the turn of the century, new forces began to buffet black education. The most powerful was disfranchisement. In 1900 North Carolina joined other former Confederate states in eliminating blacks from the political process by adopting a constitutional amendment requiring that citizens pass a literacy test before they could register to vote. The test was a way for well-to-do white Democrats, as the *Charlotte Observer* put it, to "rid themselves of the dangers of the rule of negroes and the lower class of whites."¹⁰ Poor whites got a temporary reprieve in the form of a "grandfather" clause that "provided that no person ... entitled to vote on or before January 1, 1867, or his lineal descendant, should be denied registration by reason of his failure to possess the educational qualifications, provided he shall have registered prior to December 1, 1908."¹¹ Of course, black North Carolinians, barred from registering before 1867, were effectively stripped of their political rights if they could not pass the literacy test.

⁸ Chesnutt Journal.

⁹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 400.

¹⁰ *Charlotte Observer* as quoted in Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 331. Recent discussions of the political, economic, and class conflicts embodied in the disfranchisement campaign include J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); H. Leon Prather, *Resurgent Politics and Educational Progressivism in the New South: North Carolina, 1890-1913* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979); and Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

¹¹ Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, third edition, 1973), 560.

Disfranchisement was accompanied by a rising tide of Jim Crow laws, which ordained racial segregation in public places. Discrimination in education was spurred on by the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which sanctioned "separate but equal" treatment for black citizens. In the South, where school facilities had always been separate but never equal, *Plessy v. Ferguson* emboldened men who wanted to direct scarce resources to white schools.¹² Legislators in North Carolina offered an amendment to the state constitution in 1901 that would have mandated that black schools be locally funded only in proportion to the black share of the county taxes.¹³ Since blacks were poor and paid a minuscule part of county levies, this "equality" would have ensured substandard schools for them. The amendment failed to pass, but, nonetheless, local school outlays closely reflected the tax-payment differential between the races.

At the same time, major changes were under way in the funding of white public education. In 1898 a group of southern leaders and northern philanthropists began meeting annually at the Conference for Education in the South.¹⁴ Under the direction of department store magnate Robert Ogden, the conferences started a flow of northern private money into southern educational reform. The Southern Education Board (SEB) and the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board (GEB)-private groups despite their official-sounding names-were set up to channel the philanthropic funds and coordinate school improvements across the South. The ultimate aim was to bolster the economic well being of the South. Backed by grassroots organizations such as the Women's Association for the Betterment of Public Schools in North Carolina, the SEB and the early GEB focused primarily on white education.¹⁵ During the early years of the new century, historian Louis R.

¹² Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 12, hereinafter cited as Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*. A good overview of black education and American law is Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), hereinafter cited as Kluger, *Simple Justice*. The standard work on the rise of Jim Crow laws is C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, second revised edition, 1966).

¹³ "Negro Education," *State School*, X (March, 1938), 1. An earlier law mandating proportional outlay had been judged unconstitutional by the North Carolina Supreme Court in 1886. Dennis Hargrove Cooke, *The White Superintendent in the Negro Schools in North Carolina* (Nashville, Tennessee: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1930), 17. Constitutional amendments were voted down in 1901 and 1903 at the urging of Governor Charles B. Aycock, who evidently feared that such blatant discrimination might provoke "opponents of the disfranchisement amendment to seek a judicial review of the entire educational and voting rights of Negroes." William Eskridge King, "The Era of Progressive Reform in Southern Education: The Growth of Public Schools in North Carolina" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, Durham, 1969), 257-258, hereinafter cited as King, "Era of Progressive Reform."

¹⁴ Link, *A Hard Country*, 81-123; Charles William Dabney, *Universal Education in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2 volumes, 1936), volume 2.

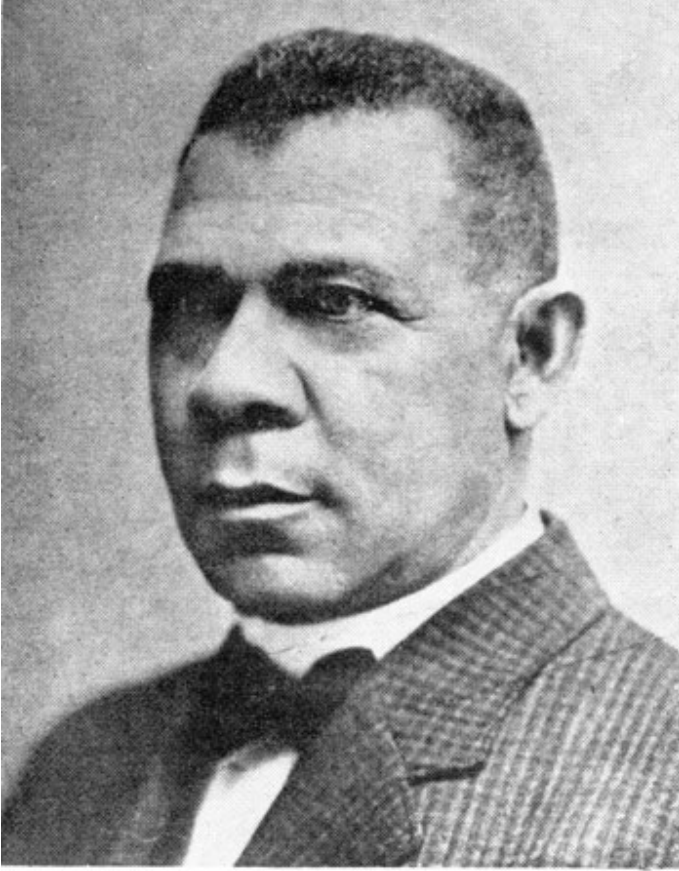
¹⁵ Link, *A Hard Country*, 102-123; James L. Leloudis II, "School Reforms in the New South: The Women's Association for the Betterment of Public Schools in North Carolina, 1902-1919," *Journal of American History*, 69 (March, 1983), 886-909.

Harlan has shown, disparities between black and white schooling actually increased.¹⁶

Booker T. Washington, the era's major African American leader, viewed the new developments with dismay. Washington had risen to acclaim in the 1880s and 1890s on his success as an educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington felt that African Americans' chief problems were economic, and he saw "industrial education" in practical skills as their route out of poverty. According to him, achieving economic success in a materialistic America was a stronger strategy than for blacks to win social acceptance simply by demanding voting rights and social equality. "I would set no limits to the attainment of the Negro in arts, in letters, or in statesmanship, but I believe the surest way to reach those ends is by laying the foundation in the little things of life that lie immediately about one's door," Washington declared. "I plead for industrial development of the Negro not because I want to cramp him, but because I want to free him. I want to see him enter the all-powerful business and commercial world."¹⁷

¹⁶ Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*; Link, *A Hard Country*, 103; Carl V. Harris, "Stability and Change in Discrimination against Black Public Schools: Birmingham, Alabama, 1871-1931," *Journal of Southern History*, LI (August, 1985), 375-416.

¹⁷ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 392-393; Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), hereinafter cited as Harlan, *Wizard of Tuskegee*. For an opposing view of Washington's strategy, see Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978).



Conceived by black educator Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee Institute staff, the Rosenwald Fund represented a massive effort to improve black rural schooling in the South through public-private partnership. Photograph of Washington from the Division of Archives and History.

The message had great appeal among both blacks and whites. Washington's willingness to accommodate to white views on voting and social equality did anger a contingent of outspoken blacks led by W. E. B. Du Bois, who in 1909-1910 founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to pursue the social and political strategies Washington had put aside.¹⁸ Many African Americans, however, faced with overt white hostility to noneconomic advancement, chose to follow Washington's lead. Moreover, Washington's persistent and persuasive arguments convinced America's wealthy white industrialists to provide an unprecedented amount of philanthropic funds for a wide variety of imaginative programs designed to uplift black America.

From the Civil War onward, there had been a tradition of northern philanthropic support for southern black education but its main focus had been the training of teachers. Private philanthropies like the George Peabody Fund and the John F. Slater

¹⁸ Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 446-447. Harlan Wizard of *Tuskegee*, 359-378.

Fund provided money mostly for colleges and preparatory schools.¹⁹ Religious groups took the same focus. The American Missionary Association, which initially conducted elementary schools, turned its attentions to upper-level education after 1870.²⁰ In North Carolina the Presbyterian Church had founded Barber-Scotia College at Concord and Charlotte's Biddle Institute (later Johnson C. Smith University), the Episcopalians started St. Augustine College at Raleigh, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) denomination established Livingstone College at Salisbury.²¹ Booker T. Washington now realized that such efforts -- including his own Tuskegee Institute -- were not enough.²² Direct aid was needed for rural public education at the elementary school level.

After trying to bring pressure on the SEB and the GEB with less than spectacular results, Washington concentrated on individual philanthropists. A turning point came in 1905 when he convinced a wealthy Quaker named Anna T. Jeanes to create a fund to bolster black public education.²³ When Jeanes died in 1908, the fund received one million dollars from her estate. The money paid the salaries of Jeanes supervisors in hundreds of counties across the South. These experienced black educators, usually women, took responsibility for supervising novice teachers in the field. They also went into the community to instruct residents in modern health care, child rearing and home economics.

¹⁹ N. C. Newbold, "Common School for Negroes in the South," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*: CXXXX (November, 1928), 3-5, hereinafter cited as Newbold, "Common Schools for Negroes;" Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 56-57; Morris R. Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 112-114, hereinafter cited as Werner, *Julius Rosenwald*.

²⁰ Linda M. Perkins, "The Black Female American Missionary Association Teacher in the South, 1861-1870," in Jeffrey J. Crow and Flora J. Hatley (eds.), *Black Americans in North Carolina and the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 130; H. Paul Douglass, *Christian Reconstruction in the South* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1909).

²¹ Inez Moore Parker, *The Rise and Decline of the Program of Education for Black Presbyterians of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1865-1970* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1977): hereinafter cited as Parker, *Education for Black Presbyterians*; David Brown, "Saint Augustine's College," Linda Harris (ed.), *Early Raleigh Neighborhoods* (Raleigh: City of Raleigh, 1938), 25.

²² By 1912 Washington was urging Tuskegee's graduates not to found any more little industrial schools in imitation of Tuskegee, but instead to work at improving the public schools. Harlan, *Wizard of Tuskegee*, 186.

²³ Harlan, *Wizard of Tuskegee*, 194-197. For more on the Jeanes Fund, see *The Jeanes Story: A Chapter in the History of American Education, 1908-1968* (Jackson, Mississippi: Jackson State University, 1979), and Lance G. E. Jones, *The Jeanes Teacher in the United States, 1908-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

The Jeanes bequest initiated a string of similar successes.²⁴ The GEB finally started to increase its support for black education. The John F. Slater Fund shifted in 1911 from supporting only private colleges to funding public high schools, colleges, and industrial training programs. The Phelps-Stokes Fund, created in 1913, undertook research studies on African American life, which guided other philanthropists. The capstone of this whole broad new philanthropic emphasis on African American public education was the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

Julius Rosenwald was born August 12, 1862, in Springfield, Illinois the son of a German-Jewish immigrant who had risen from peddler to partner in a clothing concern.²⁵ In 1909 Julius Rosenwald became president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, a firm that he joined in 1897. With the personal fortune that he amassed, he also became known as one of America's leading philanthropists.

While Rosenwald supported a wide range of causes, his chief concern became Negro education in the South. It seemed an unexpected calling for a wealthy white man whose life and business interests were centered in the Midwest. Fellow philanthropists Paul J. Sachs of Goldman Sachs Investment house and William H. Baldwin of the Southern Railway Company had influenced Rosenwald. Reading a number of books, especially Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, had also sparked big interest in charitable works for blacks.²⁶ After providing matching grants for a handful of black YMCAs, Rosenwald met Washington in 1911 and soon became a trustee of Tuskegee Institute.

²⁴ Harlan, *Wizard of Tuskegee*, 186-201; Newbold, *Common Schools for Negroes*, 3-5; Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 56-57; Werner, *Julius Rosenwald*, 112-114.

²⁵ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 5-27; Werner, *Julius Rosenwald*, 1-136.

²⁶ Werner, *Julius Rosenwald*, 107-108.



The Rosenwald Fund was named for philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears Roebuck and Company, who provided matching grants to rural communities interested in building black schools. Portrait from *Dictionary of American Portraits* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), 531.

Washington persuaded Rosenwald that help was needed not just with higher education as offered at Tuskegee but with elementary schools throughout the South. When on the occasion of Rosenwald's fiftieth birthday the tycoon presented Washington with \$25,000 to aid black colleges and preparatory academies, the black educator asked to use a small amount for elementary schools.²⁷ Rosenwald agreed, stipulating that each community had to raise its own funds to match the gift. In 1913 the first "Rosenwald School" was dedicated in Alabama.²⁸ By the time that Booker T. Washington died in 1915, Rosenwald had already personally given matching money for some eighty black schools in a three-state area. Two years later

²⁷ Kathleen Williams Boom, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund's Aid to Education in the South" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1949), 16; Lance G. E. Jones, *Negro Schools in the Southern States* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1928), 117.

²⁸ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 42.

Rosenwald established the Julius Rosenwald Fund to continue and expand his charitable activities.

The Fund was incorporated in Chicago on October 30, 1917, during the heyday of the creation of America's great foundations including the Ford, Reynolds, and Duke endowments.²⁹ Among the best-known efforts of the period was steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's matching fund for the construction of public libraries, active between 1889 and 1919.³⁰ Washington and Rosenwald may have taken the Carnegie Foundation effort as a model for their schoolhouse project, especially since Carnegie was among Washington's closest supporters. Rosenwald schools, however, quickly outnumbered the 1,412 Carnegie libraries.

For its first dozen years, rural school construction would be the Rosenwald Fund's major focus, accounting for all but \$600,000 of the first \$4,000,000 spent.³¹ At the start the program covered fourteen states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Missouri was soon added. The border state Delaware did not participate in the Rosenwald program, but it did have a similar fund provided by industrialist Pierre S. du Pont.

Rosenwald assistant Edwin R. Embree later recalled that Julius Rosenwald had two overriding reasons for giving to the cause of black education. The first of those, explained Embree, was "to stimulate public agencies to take a larger share of social responsibility. Long before the days of the New Deal -- as far back as 1915 -- he recognized clearly in modern complex society the state must assume increasingly the burdens of education and health and a multitude of other functions which in a simpler era were carried on by private charity or individual initiative."³²

²⁹ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 42. Rosenwald, in fact, did not entirely stop giving money from his private fortune after the fund was organized.

³⁰ Communities in every state except Delaware and Rhode Island received grants for Carnegie libraries. Susan Spaeth Cherry, "Carnegies Live," *American Libraries*, XII (April, 1981), 184-188, 218. For more background on libraries, see George Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969).

³¹ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 29.

³² Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 17-18.



The Rosenwald Fund's substantial contribution to black education can be seen in a comparison of these two photographs. The one-room Salem School in Anson County (above) was replaced by the new Rosenwald school (below) in 1924-1925. Built from standardized blueprints, the new structure had two classrooms and an "industrial room" for vocational training. The same two students appear in both photographs. From the Julius Rosenwald Collection, Special Collections, Fisk University Library, Nashville, Tennessee.



The other of Rosenwald's basic purposes was to spur a pattern of cooperation that would bring lasting change, well beyond the life of the grant for schoolhouse construction. Rosenwald insisted that

Certain definite conditions had to be met before the Fund would consider [making] a contribution. A school had to represent common effort by the state and county authorities and the local colored and white citizens. The state and county had to contribute to the building and agree to maintain it as a regular part of the public school system. White citizens had to take an interest and contribute part of the money, since it was felt that white leadership was essential to the success of the program in the South. Usually land for the school was deeded to the state or county as the gift of a local white man. And the Negroes themselves had to show their desire for education by making gifts of money or labor, usually both.

Embree stressed that "The program was projected not merely as a series of schoolhouses, but as a community enterprise in cooperation between citizens and officials, white and colored."³³

Establishment of the Julius Rosenwald Fund completed the interlocking array of philanthropies that Booker T. Washington helped assemble to uplift black education in the South. Its schoolhouses quickly became the symbols of the entire effort. North Carolina Director of Negro Education Nathan Carter Newbold summarized the fund's importance when he proclaimed: "School Superintendents, Jeanes teachers, General Education Board Agents, County Training School Principals, and people, all seized upon the Rosenwald school as something visible, tangible, an evidence of progress in Negro education that could not be gainsaid. It probably was the 'missing link' all agencies needed to round out a complete program for Negro schools."³⁴

Initially, Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute staff administered the Rosenwald program. Clinton J. Calloway, who also handled the institute's educational outreach efforts, supervised the school building.³⁵ By 1920, however, the burgeoning construction program was more than Tuskegee could handle, and Julius Rosenwald created the Rosenwald "Southern Office" in Nashville, Tennessee.³⁶ To run it he hired Samuel Leonard Smith, who not only had a decade's

³³ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 39.

³⁴ Newbold, "Common Schools for Negroes," 13.

³⁵ Fletcher B. Dresslar, *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1920), 7, hereinafter cited as Dresslar, *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings*; Louis R. Harlan (ed.), *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 13 volumes, 1972-1984), IV, 410; XIII, 426.

³⁶ Thomas Bean Stitely, "Bridging the Gap: A History of the Rosenwald Fund in the Development of Rural Negro Schools in Tennessee, 1912-1932" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, George Peabody

experience administering Tennessee's rural Negro school program but also possessed a keen interest in country schoolhouse design.

One of Smith's first actions at the Nashville office was to draw up a series of school plans. Production of stock blueprints, he reasoned, would enable any rural community to build a top-flight facility, without architects' fees. Smith initially issued school designs one at a time in four-page pamphlets, "made available upon request to white and Negro schools alike." Demand proved so great that in 1924 the southern office reissued the pamphlets as a booklet entitled *Community School Plans*. It included floor plans and exterior renderings of seventeen schools ranging



Schools with two, three, and four classrooms were the most common Rosenwald structures, but the fund provided designs for buildings ranging in size from one classroom (called one-teacher schools) to seven classrooms (or seven-teacher schools). The seven-teacher school (above) was built on Watkins Street in Asheboro in the mid-1920s as the Randolph County Training School and later became Central High School.

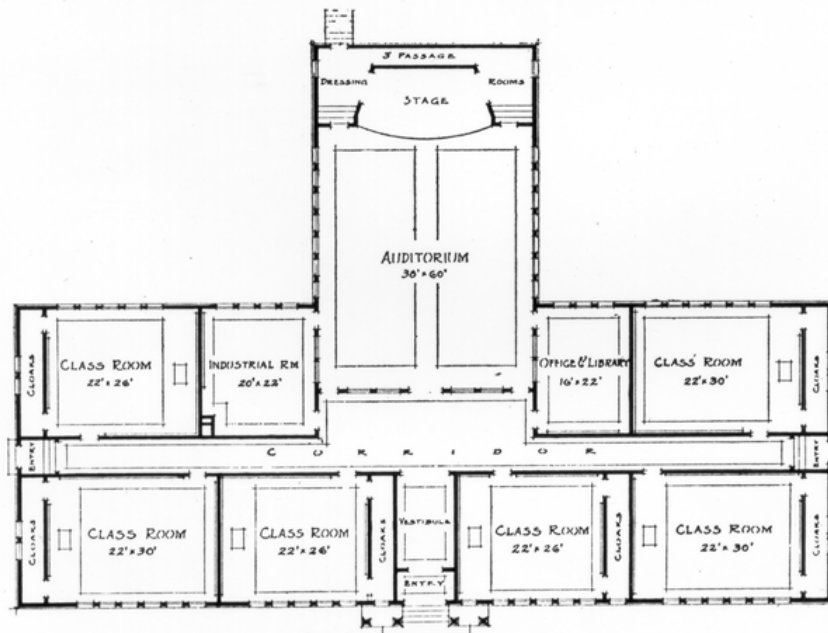
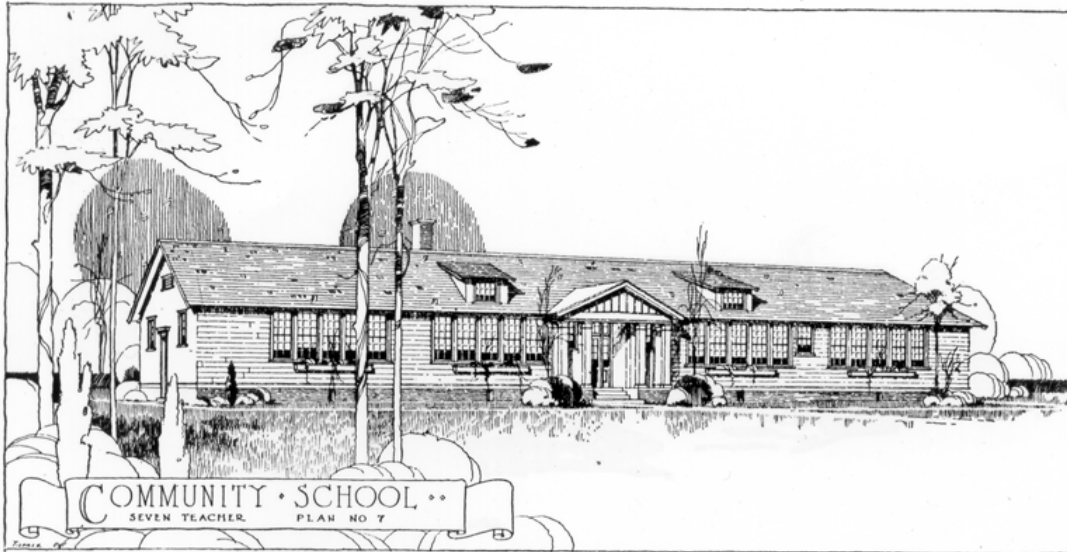
See the next illustration for the exterior sketch and floor plan that Randolph County Training School was based on.

Photograph (1988) from Thomas W. Hanchett; drawing from Samuel L. Smith, *Community School Plans* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1924).

College for Teachers, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1975), 9, 16-28, hereinafter cited as Stitely, "Bridging the Gap"; Harlan, *Wizard of Tuskegee*, 214-215; Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 40-41.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLANS

01



FLOOR PLAN No 7
SEVEN TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY

of



Ideally, the fund wanted is schools located on landscaped plots, with playing fields, well-built privies, and gardens for the instruction of “industrial” classes. This artist’s conception of a two-teacher school on a two-acre lot is from the cover of Smith’s *Community School Plans*.

in size from structures having one teacher to those having seven teachers. Because there was generally one teacher per room, the term “one-teacher school” meant a one-classroom building, “two-teacher” meant two rooms, and so on. The plans also included two designs for teachers’ residences, plus a “Sanitary Privy for Community School.” Along with the designs, the booklet contained contractor’s specifications and advice on site location and size, painting, and landscaping. Once a community chose a design, detailed blueprints and specifications could be obtained from the Rosenwald Fund via a state’s education office.³⁷

Rosenwald plans incorporated the most up-to-date designs in American rural architecture.³⁸ With electricity unavailable in most rural areas, the principal

³⁷ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 52; Samuel L. Smith, *Community School Plans* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1924), 1-2, 24-32, hereinafter cited as Smith, *Community School Plans*. Smith published updated editions of *Community School Plans* in 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1931. All quotations used here are drawn from the 1924 *Community School Plans*.

³⁸ One useful secondary source on the “material culture” of southern rural schools in the period is Susan Margaret Giamo, “Health, Neatness, Comfort, Order and Beauty in the Schoolroom’: The Campaign to Improve Material Condition in South Carolina’s Public Schools, 1903-1920” (unpublished master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 1986). Despite their large

concern was the maximization of natural light. The Rosenwald designs used groupings of tall, double-hung sash windows oriented to catch only east-west sunshine. That pattern was based on the work of Fletcher B. Dresslar, one of America's major theoreticians on school architecture and Smith's favorite professor during his student days at George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville. Dresslar lectured that "in warm weather southern exposure is more uncomfortable all day long than either east or west exposure and ventilation through windows with shades." Dresslar argued that "on dark days a northern light will not command sufficient light for children to do their work safely."³⁹ Smith drew two separate versions of each plan, so that no matter what the site, a community could construct a building with proper east-west classroom orientation.

Interior color schemes, seating plans, and even window shade arrangements were specified to make the fullest use of sunlight. The specifications required tan window shades rather than the more opaque traditional green, preferable with two shades per window for more accurate regulation of light. Floor plans always showed seating arrangements with the windows at the children's left side; that way the pupils' writing arms would not cast shadows on their desk tops. (This worked only for the right-handed majority, of course.) Light paint colors were deemed essential, to reflect maximum illumination. The fund permitted only two interior paint treatments: a cream ceiling with buff walls and walnut-stained wainscoting or dado or an ivory cream ceiling with light gray walls and walnut-stained wainscoting or dado. The layout was planned to be "simple and efficient," omitting corridors wherever possible.⁴⁰

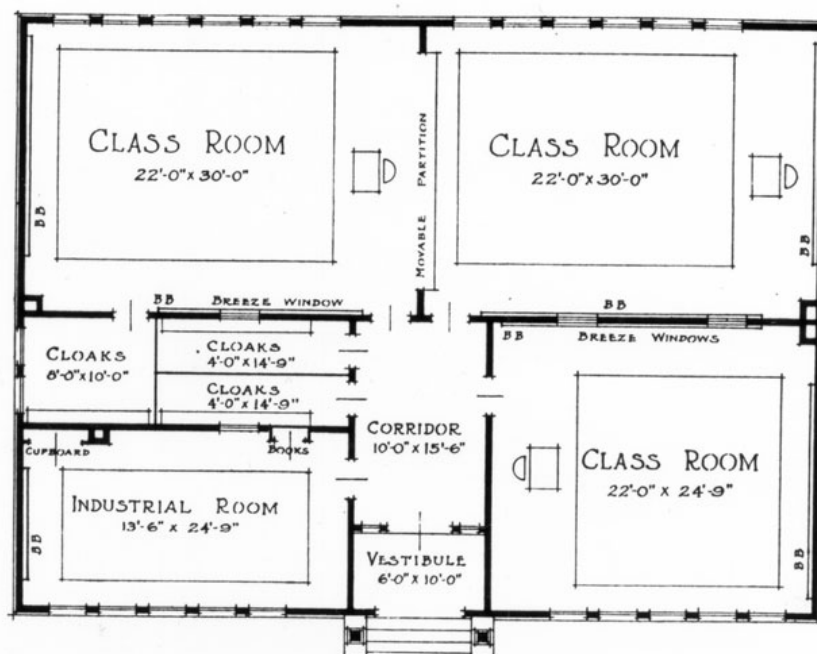
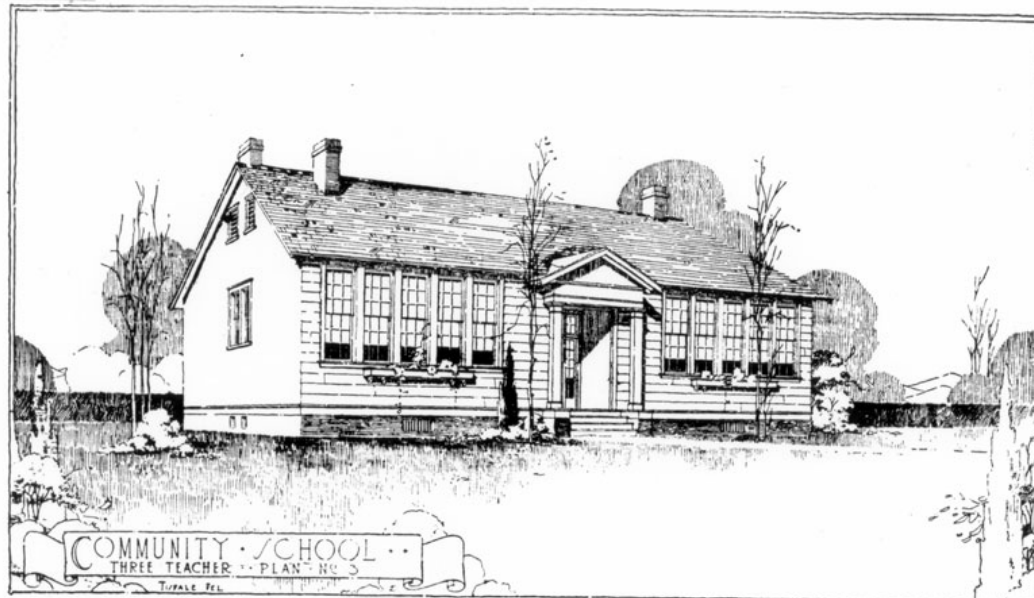
In two particular interior design features, Rosenwald schools reflected Progressive-era educational thought. The rallying cry of reformers of the day was to reunite the school with the "real-life" experiences of the community. Toward this objective, each Rosenwald school included an "industrial room," a bit smaller than a regular classroom, where girls could be taught "sewing and cooking and the boys farming and simple work with tools."⁴¹ The industrial rooms owed their genesis most directly to

number, Rosenwald Schools – and black schools in general – have been neglected in the two most recent books on American rural school architecture: Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1984), and Eric Sloane, *The Little Red Schoolhouse* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972). For a look at rural school design in another section of the United States in the 1880s-1930s era, see Kingston Heath, "A Dying Heritage: One-Room Schools of Gallatin, Montana," in Camille Wells (ed.), *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* (Annapolis, Maryland: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 2 volumes, 1982), I, 201-216.

³⁹ Dresslar, *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings*, 9-10.

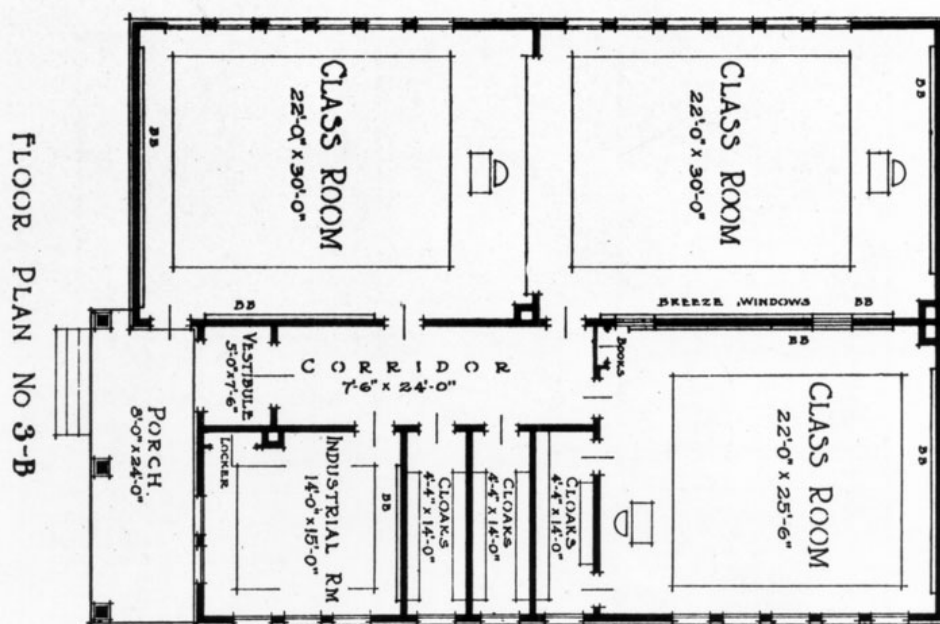
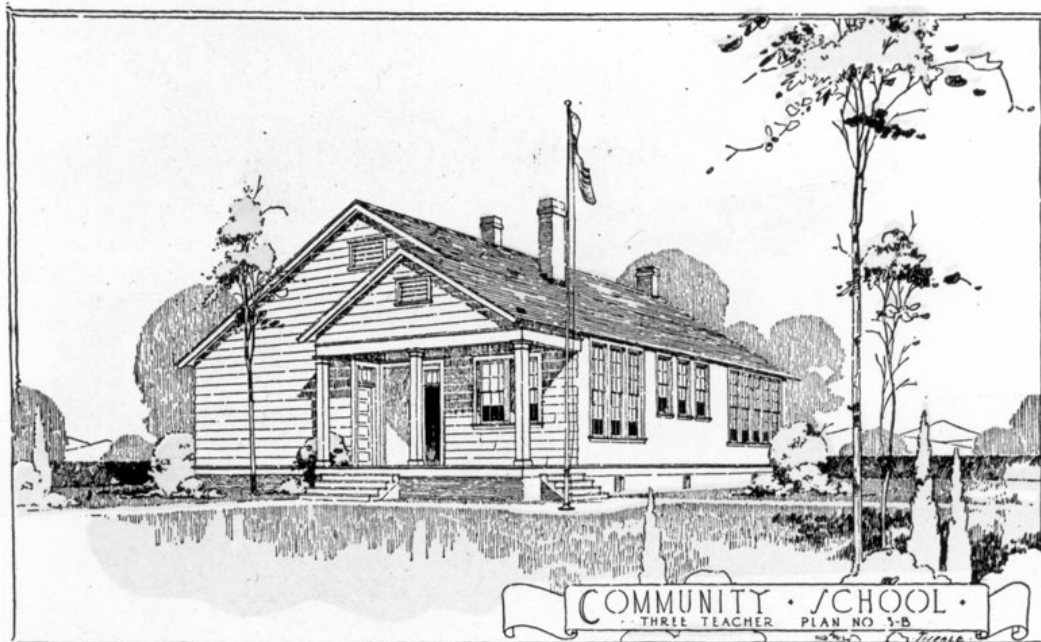
⁴⁰ Smith, *Community School Plans*, 29.

⁴¹ Embree and Waxman. *Investment in People*. 39; Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Negro's Place in American Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), 51-53. For background on the national movement toward rural vocational education, see Lawrence A. Cremin. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 41-



Rosenwald plans incorporated the most up-to-date designs in American rural school architecture. The three-teacher facility in the drawing below was designed "to face east of west only." The schools originally had no electricity, and to maximize natural light the plan included detailed suggestions for window placement, desk orientation, blackboard location, and other arrangements. A movable

partition allowed the two rear classrooms to be combined into a community meeting space. A variation of the same building appears below. That model was intended "to face north or south only" to take the best advantage of natural light. Each Rosenwald school plan usually had two such versions. Drawings from Smith, *Community School Plans*.



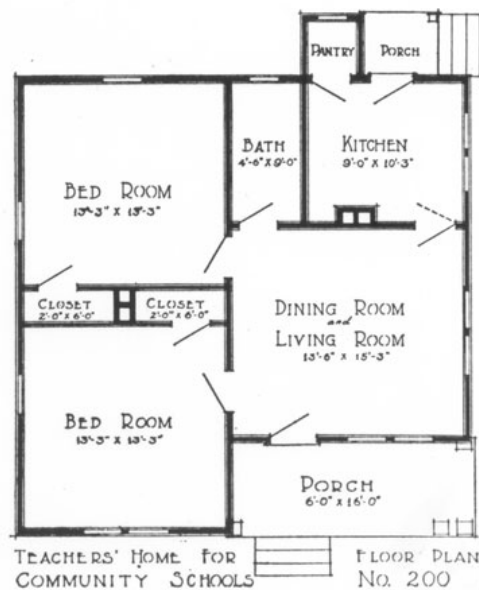
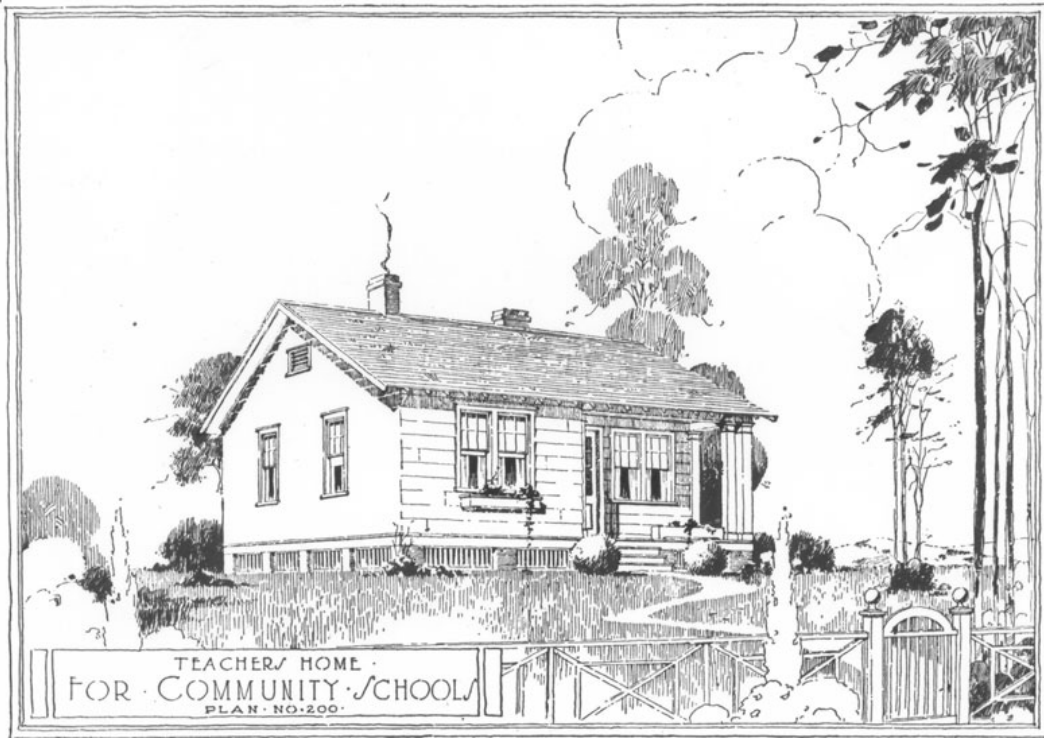
Booker T. Washington's teachings, but they were also part of a wider trend toward more relevant supplemental education, for rural whites as well as blacks. Each Rosenwald school's interior design also encouraged its use as a meeting center for the adult community. The trend for using schools for that purpose emerged in northern cities in the 1890s and extended to the rural areas by the 1910s.⁴² Samuel L. Smith noted:

the best modern school is one which is designed to serve the entire community for twelve months in the year... Whenever possible a good auditorium, large enough to seat the entire community, should be erected in connection with every community school. If there are not sufficient funds for an auditorium, two adjoining classrooms with movable partitions may be made to serve this purpose.

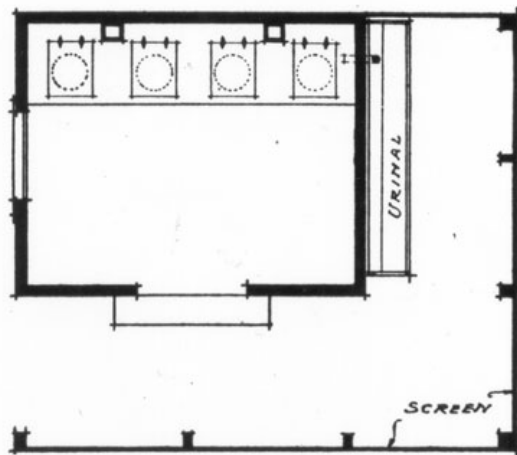
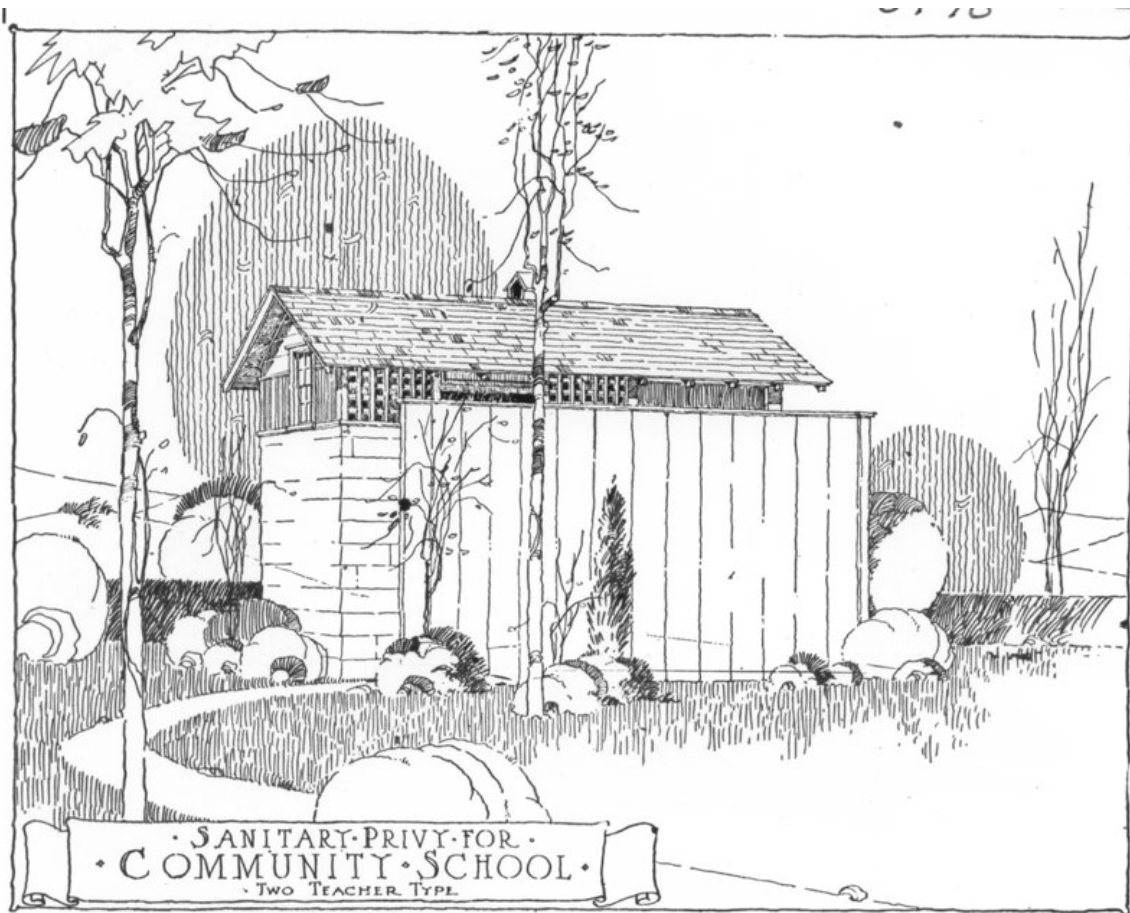
Exterior architecture was straightforward, with only the barest hint of Colonial or Bungalow trim, then the popular styles. All buildings were one-story tall, a characteristic that would not become prevalent in American schools for another generation. Construction specifications matched those of a good suburban house of the day -- often making the Rosenwald building the envy of white country neighbors. Though a handful of the largest schools had brick exteriors, most were sheathed in weatherboard, with brick chimneys to carry the smoke from the stoves that stood in each classroom. The *Community School Plans* booklet suggested three exterior color schemes: "White trimmed in gray or gray trimmed in white would be attractive. If it is desired to use a wood preservative stain, a nut brown trimmed in white or cream would be satisfactory." Smith recommended a minimum two-acre site, with the school located near one corner, to "give ample space for the schoolhouse, two sanitary privies, a teacher's home, playgrounds for the boys and girls, a plot for agricultural demonstrations, and proper landscaping."⁴³

⁴² Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 77-84.

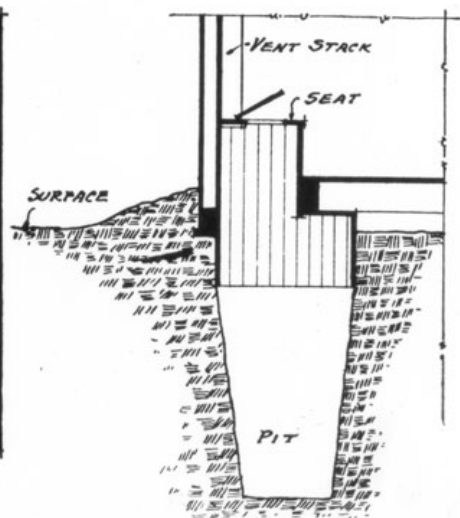
⁴³ Smith, *Community School Plans*, 1.



Most of the Rosenwald facilities were schoolhouses, but the fund also provided for a few teachers' houses (above) and encouraged the construction of sanitary outhouses (next illustration). Drawings from Smith, *Community School Plans*.



PLAN



SECTION

The Rosenwald system stipulated that fund activities be channeled through the state education departments of the southern states.⁴⁴ Rosenwald officials thus hoped to build a lasting commitment to black education at the state level by creating a network of knowledgeable, dedicated administrators. In the early 1910s the GEB had provided money to help southern states hire administrators to deal specifically with rural schools. North Carolina was the second state (after Virginia) to appropriate the required matching funds, and in 1913 the state appointed two "agents for rural schools," one for white facilities and one for black.⁴⁵ N. C. Newbold was the choice for "Negro" agent," as the latter position was known, and he proved to be an exceptionally able leader.

A white man trained at Trinity College (later Duke University), Newbold had taught in Asheboro and Roxboro and worked as superintendent of schools in Washington County before being hired as Negro agent.⁴⁶ He now made black education his life work, serving thirty-seven years in the same position despite offers "to accept more lucrative educational jobs," according to Samuel L. Smith. Newbold's "broad experience, ... sympathetic attitude and great enthusiasm" won the respect of fellow educators and of rural blacks and whites as well.⁴⁷ He exhibited a commitment to black participation, routinely hiring black administrators. He demonstrated particular skill in convincing state legislators and localities to allocate money to match foundation grants, and as a result North Carolina consistently ranked among the first states to embark on new projects. Through a combination of diplomacy and persistence, Newbold built one of the largest black education staffs in the South and took the lead in school construction.

⁴⁴ Samuel L. Smith, *Builders of Goodwill: The Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910 to 1950* (Nashville, Tennessee: Tennessee Book Company, 1950), hereinafter cited as Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 12-13.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 12-13; A. M. Proctor, "N. C. Newbold, '95, and Negro Education," *Trinity Alumni Register* (April, 1924), 158-160; Hugh Victor Brown, *E-Quality Education in North Carolina among Negroes* (Raleigh: Irving-Swain Press, 1964), 93-95, 107-108; Hugh Victor Brown, *A History of the Education of Negroes in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Irving-Swain Press, 1961), 49-65, 139-140. Newbold retired in 1950 and died at his home in Raleigh, December 23, 1957. *Duke Alumni Register*, IV (February, 1958), 32.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 12-13.



North Carolina Director of Negro Education Nathan Carter Newbold demonstrated considerable skill in convincing state legislators and local governments to allocate funds to match foundation grants for the construction of Rosenwald schools. Photograph from the files of the Division of Archives and History.

Newbold's enthusiasm for Rosenwald schools predated formal creation of the fund. In 1915 Newbold arranged with Julius Rosenwald for the construction of one of the first schoolhouses outside the Tuskegee area. On October 8, 1915 the school – a two-teacher facility in Chowan County – was completed and inspected.⁴⁸ The black community contributed \$486, the white community and the school system furnished \$836, and Julius Rosenwald himself provided \$300, for a total of \$1,622.

When the Rosenwald Fund was established in 1917, one of its first actions was to offer each state a grant to help hire a black administrator to assist the white "Negro Agent." Not all states were willing to install an African American in such a position of

⁴⁸ William F. Credle, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund in North Carolina," *North Carolina Teacher*, 1 (June, 1925), 290-291.

responsibility. Nonetheless, by 1918 black assistants were at work in North Carolina, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia. They excited interest among blacks for schools and helped communities raise money to qualify for Rosenwald schools. They also obtained funds for county training schools, for the employment of Jeanes supervisors, and for lengthening school terms. Other duties included various tasks designed by county public school superintendents when the assistants visited their counties.⁴⁹ C. H. Moore of Greensboro became Newbold's first black assistant.

As work increased, the states' offices of Negro education began to hire white assistants as well under a new program funded by the GEB. Those individuals either had special training in education or were sent back to college for graduate study. Their responsibilities were quite different from the grass-roots fund-raising work of their black counterparts. The white assistants had training in curriculum development, rural and secondary education, and schoolhouse planning and sanitation. They brought an element of professionalism to the development of black schools, and they but not their black co-workers were eligible to succeed the "Negro Agent."⁵⁰ Through Newbold's urging, North Carolina in July, 1919, became the first state to hire a white assistant under the program -- one A. T. Atmore.⁵¹

In 1921 the North Carolina General Assembly formally created the Division of Negro Education within the State Department of Public Instruction.⁵² The staff consisted of Director Newbold and five administrators: three black, two white, plus a secretary and two stenographers.⁵³ In addition to directing the Rosenwald program, the office supervised black state colleges and other teacher training activities, oversaw black high school and elementary school education, and eventually also administered North Carolina's Jeanes program.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 43-44. The offer was "to pay one half the salary of a trained Negro assistant in each southern state, on condition that the state provide at least half the salary and expenses."

⁵⁰ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 43-44.

⁵¹ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 43-44.

⁵² Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 56-57.

⁵³ By 1928 the Division of Negro Education had, in addition to Director Newbold, eight staff members, with the following salaries: assistant director, \$3,300; supervisor of Rosenwald Fund, \$3,000; secretary, \$1,800; Jeanes Fund clerk, \$1,500; Supervisor of Rosenwald buildings, \$2,550; State Jeanes supervisor, \$1,950; high school supervisor, \$2,950; stenographer, \$1,200. "Outline of Request to the General Education Board for Development of a Statewide Program for Negro Education in North Carolina," 1928, Articles and Speeches, Division of Negro Education, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Records, Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Division of Negro Education Records.

⁵⁴ Nathan C. Newbold (ed.), *Five North Carolina Negro Educators* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 61-86.

The Rosenwald system remained an integral part of the division's efforts through the agency's first decade. By the time the Rosenwald Fund closed out its construction effort in 1932, North Carolina had constructed 813 Rosenwald buildings, far more than any other state. This achievement was well ahead of second-place Mississippi, which erected 633, and third-place Texas, which built 527. Of the North Carolina projects, 787 were schoolhouses, 18 were teachers' residences, and 8 were industrial education shops.⁵⁵

As Newbold became busy with overseeing the entire Division of Negro Education, the responsibility for the success of North Carolina's Rosenwald program increasingly fell to his deputies.⁵⁶ When the Division of Negro Education was formed in 1921, Newbold replaced his assistants Atmore and Moore with William F. Credle (white) and George E. Davis (black). The two new men proved adept at working with Rosenwald officials, local school boards, and particularly with black farm families across North Carolina the grass-roots supporters of the Rosenwald effort.

William Frontis Credle, the white assistant, took the title "Supervisor of the Rosenwald Fund" for North Carolina. A University of North Carolina graduate, Credle, like Newbold, was a former county school superintendent, having served in his native Hyde County before leaving for an army stint in World War I.⁵⁷ In 1921 he joined the Division of Negro Education in a double role both as Rosenwald deputy and as assistant director of schoolhouse planning, advising local communities both black and white. In his Rosenwald work, Credle divided his time between his Raleigh office, where he prepared project budgets and served as liaison with fund officials, and the field, where he consulted with communities considering schools, inspected completed projects, and arranged grant payments.

The summer after Credle began work, Newbold sent him to George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville to take graduate courses in "schoolhouse planning and sanitation" under Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar, Samuel L. Smith's old mentor. Credle's abilities caught Smith's eye; North Carolina's Rosenwald leadership, Smith later wrote, was "largely ... a result of the specially trained assistant state agent."⁵⁸ In 1929 Smith called Credle to Nashville to help administer the South's entire

⁵⁵ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 50-51; *Report on Schoolhouse Construction, Transportation, and School Libraries to July 1, 1932* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1932).

⁵⁶ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 177. See also General Correspondence of Director, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁵⁷ *Peabody Reflector and Alumni News* (November, 1937), 391; *News and Observer* (Raleigh), October 28, 1950, hereinafter cited as *News and Observer*; Author's interview with Mrs. Ethel Pouncey (Credle's widow), Raleigh, May 24, 1988 (notes on interview in possession of author).

⁵⁸ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 48-49.

schoolhouse building program in its last years. Julius Rosenwald is said to have joked, "Go ahead and employ him. He is building so many schools in North Carolina we will save money by bringing him into our office."⁵⁹



William Credle (above) served as white assistant to Director N.C. Newbold when North Carolina created the Division of Negro Education within the State Department of Public Instruction in 1921. Portrait courtesy of Ms. Ethel Pouncey.

George E. Davis served as Newbold's black assistant. Photo below shows Davis (second from the right in the rear row) with his family. From Arthur B. Caldwell (ed.), *History of the American Negro and His Institutions* (Atlanta: A.B. Caldwell Published, 4 volumes, 1921), IV.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 48-49.



Credle's black counterpart in the Division of Negro Education was Dr. George Edward Davis, officially titled "Supervisor of Rosenwald Buildings." Davis was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, on March 24, 1863. According to author Arthur B. Caldwell, Davis's father, Edward Alexander Davis, served for thirty years as a member of the police force of Wilmington.⁶⁰ George Davis's upbringing was unusually privileged for a nineteenth century black youth, but his childhood and early adulthood included a variety of experiences that provided valuable background for the future Rosenwald officer.⁶¹ After attending Wilmington's

⁶⁰ Arthur B. Caldwell (ed.), *History of the American Negro and His Institutions* (Atlanta: A. B. Caldwell Publishing, 4 volumes, 1921), IV, 52-54, hereinafter cited as Caldwell, *History of the American Negro*; *Greensboro Daily News*, January 13, 1959; *Greensboro Record*, January 12, 1959. See also Inez Moore Parker, *The Biddle-Johnson C. Smith University Story* (Charlotte: Charlotte Publishing, 1973), 8-9; William H. Huffman, "Dr. George E. Davis House: Survey and Research Report," unpublished report, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, Charlotte, 1984.

⁶¹ Davis was a fascinating study in contrasts: a man of almost patrician background and extensive education who could work successfully with illiterate backcountry farmers; an "active member of the Presbyterian Church" who was buried as a Catholic; a man with a deep emotional commitment to overcoming white racism who nonetheless wrote a letter to his superior asking for time off to participate in a Confederate States of America celebration, saying that in his opinion slavery had not been central to the Civil War and that "My father was stricken with Yellow Fever while on duty at Fort Fisher in its defense in '63." Davis to W. F. Credle, May 17, 1929, Correspondence of Supervisor of the Rosenwald Fund, Division of Negro Education Records.

Gregory Institute, Davis taught schools in Laurinburg in his late teens. He then went to Charlotte's Biddle Institute, the keystone of the Presbyterian church's missionary efforts in black education for the Southeast.

Davis did graduate work at Howard University in Washington, D.C., then returned to Charlotte in 1885 to become Biddle University's first black professor. He taught natural science and sociology for nearly four decades, served as an athletic coach, was dean of faculty for fifteen years, and was at different times secretary and president of the State Teachers' Association.⁶² Though his focus was on the Biddle campus in that period, Davis also became involved in public schools through his wife, Marie G. Davis, who was principal of the city's black Fairview School. Together the couple took a leading role in the establishment of summer institutes at Biddle, designed to provide supplemental training for the young teachers in the region's black elementary schools.

By the time he retired from teaching at Biddle in 1920, Davis had five grown children, lived in a handsome two-story Victorian residence that he owned at the edge of campus, and controlled a number of profitable real estate investments. Shunning a sedentary retirement, Davis gave up the comfort of home for a second career as a builder of schools. He proved to be a tireless foot soldier of fund raising. Almost single-handedly, Davis generated support for schools among rural African Americans across North Carolina's 500-mile length.

Raising local black money for Rosenwald schools was no simple task among the cotton and tobacco tenant farmers of North Carolina. According to Rosenwald disciples Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, "Some [black people] felt that if no schooling or classes in old church buildings had been good enough for them, it was good enough for their children. Others did not trust the white philanthropists from the North. Why should they give something for nothing, and especially to colored folks? If they did raise their share of the money, would the white men keep their promise? And Negroes were so poor -- how was it possible to get so much money? One hundred dollars, two hundred dollars were fantastic sums to little communities of impoverished Negroes."⁶³

The requirements for black support were stiff by any standards. A four-teacher Rosenwald school, for example, could cost \$4,000, as much as a middle-class suburban house. The Rosenwald Fund set maximum amounts it would contribute to a building. It determined that sum according to the number of classrooms rather than according to any particular proportions between black and white or public and private funding. The fund budgeted from \$200 for a one-teacher structure to \$2,600 for a six-teacher facility.⁶⁴ In practice, public funds from the local school board

⁶² Caldwell, *History of the American Negro*, IV, 52-54.

⁶³ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 43.

⁶⁴ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 41, 42.

usually paid just over half the construction cost of a building. Local black private contributions and the Rosenwald Fund split the remainder. Local white private contributions generally were negligible; Rosenwald officials charged with promoting white community participation were evidently satisfied by the involvement of the white-dominated school board.

Davis spent most of the 1920s on the road, following unpaved farm lanes from settlement to settlement to kindle the fires of education. "Travelled approximately 1100 miles visited sixteen Rosenwald Schools. Helped in raising \$600.00 for Rosenwald Buildings. Addressed 2,000 people," reads the summary at the end of his monthly report for March, 1929.⁶⁵ Davis crisscrossed the state by automobile, seldom spending more than two days in the same place, and sometimes not returning to his Charlotte home for weeks.⁶⁶

OUR GOAL FOR 1928-'29

A Better School & Better Facilities.

Financial Educational Rally

To Be Held At

White Store Colored School

Saturday, Feb. 18, 1928

For the purpose of raising money for a
new school building.

Many prominent visitors are expected to be present, including Prof. R. W. Allen, County Supt. of Public Instruction, Miss Leila A. Kelley, Supervisor of Colored Schools, Anson Co., Rev. W. W. Blair, P.E. of A.M.E. Zion Church, Wadesboro District.

Dr. George Davis, Agt. Rosenwald School Building Fund, will be the principle speaker for the day.

Special program arranged. Free dinner served.
Program begins at 1 p. m.

Realizing the fact that the only medium through which any race can achieve success is by its people, we are inviting every community, school and church to be present in order that our goal might be successfully reached.

Chesleigh Walker, Principal
J. V. Crowder, Sec'y. G. C. Davis, Treas.

We are expecting you to be present.

Rallying!

for

**Rosenwald
School
Buildings**

January 11-13, 1928

DR. GEORGE E. DAVIS, ONE OF THE GREATEST SPEAKERS OF OUR RACE, WILL DELIVER ADDRESSES AS FOLLOWS:

WEDNESDAY EVENING, JANUARY 11, 1928, at 7:30 P.M., MAGNOLIA, N. C.
THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 12, 1928, at 7:30 P.M., WALLACE, N. C.
FRIDAY AFTERNOON, JANUARY 13, 1928, at 1:00 P.M., CHINQUAPIN, N. C.
FRIDAY EVENING, JANUARY 13, 1928, at 7:30 P.M., FAISON, N. C.

DON'T MISS THIS RARE TREAT! COME ONE — COME ALL!

Remember that your School needs Money!

M. L. TURNER, Supervisor of Negro Schools

⁶⁵ "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... March 1929," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁶⁶ "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... October 1922," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

Sometimes an existing substandard school would provide the focus for Davis's efforts. Often he would begin afresh with the congregation and elders of a country church. In a region where whites discouraged black participation in nearly any organized activity, churches provided the single strong institutional framework for African American endeavors. For Davis, using church connections to build schools must have seemed especially natural. His own Presbyterian church had built in that manner the small system of elementary-level schools that provided many students for Biddle University.⁶⁷

After Davis met with black leaders of a rural community and with county school officials, a community-wide rally would be scheduled to begin fund raising efforts. "FINANCIAL EDUCATIONAL RALLY to be held at WHITE STORE COLORED SCHOOL Saturday, Feb. 18, 1928 for the purpose of raising money for a new school building," trumpeted one surviving handbill.⁶⁸ A free dinner attracted a crowd, and a "special program" of distinguished speakers talked up the need for education. At the rally in the community of White Store, the "prominent visitors" included the white Anson County school superintendent, his deputy for black education, and a Wadesboro AME Zion minister. Principal speaker for the afternoon was George E. Davis.

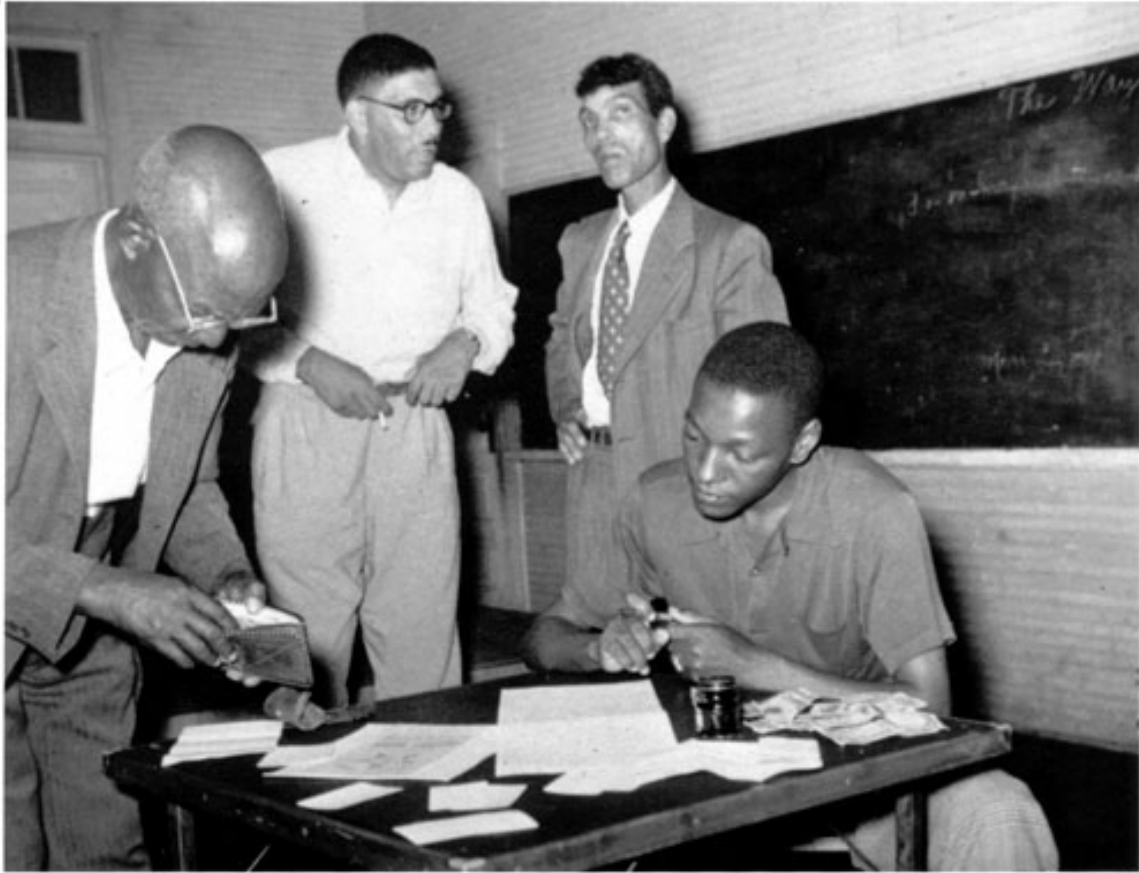
A successful rally yielded both cash donations and pledges. Raising cash in rural North Carolina during the first three decades of the twentieth century was a challenge, and it was especially difficult for the blacks who were sharecroppers. Under the sharecropping system landlords paid their tenants at harvest with a share of the crop; often no cash ever changed hands. Thus, money for the Rosenwald schoolhouses was gathered a penny and a nickel at a time. One North Carolinian observed in 1924:

"Box parties" are often given to raise money for a school building. An acre of cotton may be planted and the profits from the sale of it applied on the school. In many sections hogs and chickens are raised by the community to obtain money for buildings. At Lumber Bridge, in Robeson County, the people gave seventy thousand feet of lumber for framing and sheathing. This was cut from their own lands, hauled by their own teams to a saw mill owned by themselves, sawed by bill, and laid down on a school lot purchased with their own funds.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Biddle maintained its own high school on its Charlotte campus until 1919. The high school and the supporting prep schools may have been phased out because the Rosenwald schools were supplanting them. Parker, *Education for Black Presbyterians*.

⁶⁸ Representative handbills are in Correspondence of the Supervisor of the Rosenwald Fund, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁶⁹ Joseph K. Hart, "The Negro Builds for Himself," *Survey*, LII (September 1, 1924), 563-567, 596, hereinafter cited as Hart, "The Negro Builds for Himself."



African American farmers and sharecroppers came together in thousands of meetings like this one (location unknown) to contribute dimes and dollars to Rosenwald school projects. Eventually all but seven of North Carolina's 100 counties had at least one Rosenwald facility. Photograph from the Julius Rosenwald Collection.

Davis visited each site again and again, offering encouragement as pledges were collected, then inspecting construction to ensure it met Rosenwald standards. In a 1931 report, Davis commented approvingly upon a return visit to Thompson's Chapel School in Robeson County: "Found that additional blackboards were added after first inspection, lattice put around the building between the pines, and considerable playground equipment placed."⁷⁰ Davis also could be stern with recalcitrant school boards. The same report listed a project at Marshville in Union County where paint, seating, desks, and blackboards were substandard or absent. "Since it seemed that only the seating would be provided if Rosenwald money were granted, it was decided that in as much as the contract signed in application was not carried out to our satisfaction, to withdraw from the project, and the amount asked for was withheld."

⁷⁰ "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... March 1929," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

Completion of a Rosenwald building was cause for a celebration and sometimes for a bit more fund raising. Davis pragmatically wrote about one school: "The dedication was held mainly to have the people present that they might secure money enough to run the school for an extra month."⁷¹ Davis expressed special pleasure in the opening of Long Creek School in Pender County:

[T]he chairman of the County Board of Education, the white Committeemen of the school and the principal and faculty of the white school of the community came out and joined with the colored people in expressions of appreciation. The building was filled to capacity and perhaps as large a number were at the windows and around the doors and grounds....

I think as much satisfaction over the building was shown by the large number of white people present, most of whom were served dinner in the building, as by the Negroes themselves. I was born within thirty miles of this place and I have known the time that white people would have lost their social prestige among their fellows had they been courageous enough to come out and dine....⁷²

Davis continued to visit schools after they began operating. He arrived most often in March for "Rosenwald Day" exercises.⁷³ Fund officials created that event because they recognized a need to "re arouse community interest in schools, encourage the cleaning and beautifying of the school buildings and grounds, and to raise money for needed repairs or additions to equipment."⁷⁴ North Carolina published a pamphlet for teachers and principals to guide the celebratory and practical activities. Rosenwald Day continued to be observed well into the 1930s.

Through the efforts of Davis, Credle, Newbold, and thousands of local citizens, Rosenwald schoolhouses spread thickly across North Carolina. Eventually all but seven of the state's 100 counties boasted at least one Rosenwald facility.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... March 1929," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁷² "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... March 1929," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁷³ Rosenwald days occurred at various times in March, or sometimes in April, in different North Carolina counties. "Report of Dr. George E. Davis ... March 1929," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records; *Rosenwald School Day Program: Negro School Improvement Day* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1937).

⁷⁴ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 52-53.

⁷⁵ "Rosenwald School Building in North Carolina, from the Beginning until July 1, 1930," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records. See also map in *Report on Schoolhouse Construction, Transportation, and School Libraries to July 1, 1932* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius

Rosenwald schoolhouses were more common in the piedmont and the coastal plain, and rarer -- though not unknown -- in the predominantly white counties of the Blue Ridge mountains in the western part of the state.

Concentrations were highest in two areas. One was the so-called "Black Belt" of tobacco counties in the northern coastal plain, particularly Halifax, Edgecombe, and Warren counties, where black population equaled or even exceeded white. Close behind the Black Belt were the counties that constituted the heart of North Carolina's cotton-growing region in the southern piedmont: Anson County and Mecklenburg County.

Mecklenburg County furnishes a good example from which to explore the establishment and day-to-day operations of Rosenwald schools. Mecklenburg erected twenty-six Rosenwald buildings by July 1, 1930, a somewhat higher number than most counties, but a figure in line with the county's black population.⁷⁶ Mecklenburg in the 1910s and 1920s remained remarkably rural, despite the presence of Charlotte at its center. The county had long ranked among the state's leading agricultural producers, particularly in cotton, and it had the sizable poor black population that characterized southern agriculture in the period.⁷⁷ In both 1920 and 1930 Mecklenburg's rural blacks numbered just over 12,000, constituting around 30 percent of the county's nonurban population.⁷⁸ Many worked as tenant farmers. "In 1920," wrote economist Edgar T. Thompson, "61.9 per cent of Mecklenburg's farms were operated by tenants, and the percentage was higher than that of 85 other North Carolina counties."⁷⁹ Rosenwald schools sprang up

Rosenwald Fund, 1932).

⁷⁶ Thomas W. Hanchett, "Rosenwald Schools in Mecklenburg County: Survey and Research Report," unpublished report, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1987, hereinafter cited as Hanchett, "Rosenwald Survey and Research Report." Several people helped locate the Mecklenburg schools, including Director Dan Morrill and researcher Wanda Hendricks of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, the Reverend Robert Shirley, Allan Purvis, and *Charlotte Observer* architecture critic Richard Maschal. Carrol York and Wanda Hills graciously provided access to the records of the Physical Facilities Office of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education.

⁷⁷ United States agricultural census figures consistently showed Mecklenburg among North Carolina's top twenty counties in the production of cotton, grain, and dairy products throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1890 Mecklenburg was the state's number one cotton-producing county.

⁷⁸ *County Population Trends: North Carolina, 1790-1969: State, Region, County, Residence, Color* (Raleigh: Published jointly by the Carolina Population Center of the University of North Carolina and the North Carolina Department of Administration, 1969), 65.

⁷⁹ Edgar T. Thompson, *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte: Social and Economic* (Charlotte: Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, 1926), 171, 195. Thompson noted that the 1920 census reported Mecklenburg as having 150 black farm owners and 1,497 black tenant farm families.

throughout the county, but none was in the separate Charlotte school system, which did not qualify for Rosenwald assistance because of its urban nature.

School construction began slowly with one-teacher facilities and progressed to larger structures as the program gained momentum. The first Rosenwald projects in Mecklenburg came even before George Davis joined the state program. State records show that in 1918-1919 Mecklenburg citizens raised matching money for their first pair of one-teacher Rosenwald schools.⁸⁰ Another one-teacher unit followed in 1919-1920, and in 1920-1921 four schools were funded, ranging in size from one teacher to four teachers. Creation of the Division of Negro Education in 1921 gave a new impetus to the school building schedule and a trend toward larger structures. No more one-teacher Rosenwald units were constructed in Mecklenburg after 1921, as the county concentrated on two-, three-, and especially four-teacher buildings.

Mecklenburg's Rosenwald schools often stood near churches, several of which were Presbyterian, probably thanks to Davis's long-standing Presbyterian contacts through Biddle University. Baptist, AME Zion, and Methodist congregations also helped build schools. Other Mecklenburg schools seem to have had no religious connection. At Billingsville, for example, the black founders of that farm community, Sam and Alice Billings, sold two acres of their own land to the county school board in order to secure a Rosenwald facility.⁸¹

All the schools were centers of small rural black settlements. Such communities, now disappearing, were an important characteristic of the rural landscape of the Carolinas in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Davis, the Rosenwald program played a significant part in their development: "Building good Rosenwald schools has helped to stabilize industrial and social conditions by encouraging colored people to own and build their own homes near such schools."⁸² Some of those communities survive today in Mecklenburg County -- Huntersville and Rockwell, for example. Others are much altered, such as Billingsville (Grier Heights) and especially Little Hope, which have become black suburban sections of Charlotte with new brick ranch-style houses. Many have vanished in the same way as McClintock, where only fields surround the old school and church, and the descendants of the former tenant farmers now drive from homes in Charlotte to worship each Sunday.

⁸⁰ "Rosenwald School Building in North Carolina, from the Beginning until July 1, 1930," Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁸¹ William H. Huffman, "Billingsville School: Survey and Research Report," unpublished report, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1985.

⁸² Hart, "The Negro Builds for Himself," 563-567, 596.



By July 1930, Mecklenburg County had erected twenty-six Rosenwald buildings, a number larger than that of most counties but in keeping with the size of its black population. Pictured here is McClintock School on McClintock Road in the southern part of the county. The building stands today on property owned by the adjacent McClintock Presbyterian Church; its pastor, Rev. Robert Shirley, appears in this photo wearing the dark coat. Others in the photo are former McClintock students: front, Christine Luster; second row (left to right) Shelby Foust, Lucille Stewart, Robert Foust, unidentified; third row, Mary Harris, unidentified, George Reid; rear, Linwood Foust. Photograph (copyright 1987) by Deidra Laird, courtesy of the *Charlotte Observer*.

The Rosenwald schools clearly represented an improvement in basic education for blacks in Mecklenburg County. Before-and-after pictures show the physical contrast between old, dark, tumbled-down makeshift schoolhouses and the large new buildings with their big windows. Yet, students who attended Rosenwald classes have bittersweet memories to share today. "The devotion started about 8:30. We sang songs, and we said the Lord's Prayer, and the 23rd Psalm was always said," recalls Shelby Foust, a McClintock pupil in the 1920s. The schools had wooden benches and desks facing a large blackboard in each classroom. One of the county's largest Rosenwald schools, McClintock was a four-teacher facility, so the eight grades had to double up. According to George Reid, a student in the 1930s, "The teacher would have a few pupils in the second grade and a few in the third grade. While she'd be teaching the second grade, the third grade would be studying." Samuel Spears remembers the same practice at Rockwell School in the 1920s: "You'd have one grade on one side of the room, and one on the other, with an aisle in between.... The principal always taught the oldest grades."

Teachers maintained strict discipline. McClintock alumna Christine Luster testifies: "There was a cloakroom where the children were disciplined, and at that time children really had a lot of pride. It wasn't the anger type of pride; they did not want their peers to see them disciplined." Fellow pupil Linwood Foust recalls: "You really didn't need to see the discipline. You could hear the discipline." Teachers used "a special kind of hickory stick," reports Shelby Foust. "Down behind the church there grew some kind of red hickory that didn't break. They kept them by the dozens."

Despite the physical improvements offered by the Rosenwald structures, conditions still remained spartan. The big windows, so important for light, also meant chilly rooms in the winter. "When you got here, it was terrible. You'd be so cold your fingers, they'd just ache like a toothache. Teacher, she'd get a wash pan and put some cold water in it and you'd wash your hands in that cold water," recalls Lucille Stewart, who attended McClintock School, 1930-1937.⁸³ Dortha Wallace, who taught at Clear Creek, 1930-1944, revives a memory of arriving half an hour before school started to light a fire in the stove in her classroom: "The kindling and the coal would already be inside. After you would start the fire you would have to keep it going." "We'd put benches around the potbelly stove, and that's how we'd stay warm," reflects Clear Creek alumnus Johnnie Lineberger. "We'd usually keep our coats on."⁸⁴

Mecklenburg's black schools opened during the summer as well in order to have a fall break for harvesting. Remembers Lucille Stewart, "When you was going to school in August, you could go half a day, then you went home and picked cotton." Black schools closed completely from late August to early October, but white schools did not. According to longtime Clear Creek principal Paris McCorkle, "We didn't think about that much. It was just a normal thing we did at the time."

But black children keenly noticed the disparities between their schools and white facilities. Christine Luster, a McClintock pupil, 1949-1952, still feels it: "The thing that bothered me the most was I lived right behind the white school. And every time I passed that school I wondered what education was like inside." Fellow student Linwood Foust, now a Charlotte lawyer, found out. Playing basketball outside the white Steele Creek School, he crept inside to the water fountain, only to be ordered out. "But you got to see those shiny floors. They had tile!"

"Ten o'clock was recess, and we went outside to play," says Shelby Foust. "That gave us an opportunity to go to the bathroom. We only had outside bathrooms, and we would have to line up because there wasn't but two ... holes." At recess children

⁸³ *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1986; Author's interview with Samuel Spears, graduate of Rockwell School, February 11, 1987 (notes on interview in possession of author), hereinafter cited as Spears interview.

⁸⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, February 7, 1983.

played horseshoes, remembers Linwood Foust: "They weren't the horseshoes you see now. They were true horses' shoes, the little ones.... We did sack races, ring-around-a-rosy, the kind of game that did not require any equipment. There was no equipment, so we created our own games."⁸⁵

Rosenwald schoolhouses, like most rural schools in the South both black and white, only offered education through the eighth grade. In the early days a black farm child in Mecklenburg County had virtually no chance to go on to high school, unless the student was lucky enough to have relatives to live with in Charlotte, where blacks could attend Second Ward High School. After finishing eighth grade at Rockwell School, young Samuel Spears tried to go on to ninth grade at Second Ward by hitchhiking and walking to town every day. But one day, "It came to snow eight inches, or more. I asked the teacher to let me out early because I had such a long way to go, but the teacher wouldn't let me go. I ended up walking the whole way couldn't get a ride. When I got home I was froze. I told my Mom and Dad, 'I'd like to go to school, but I can't stand this.' I'd like to been froze to death. That's why I didn't go to school no more."



Another Mecklenburg County example is the four-teacher Caldwell School, seen here in a photo made shortly after it was constructed in 1924 – 1925. The building stands today on N.C. Highway 73 near Lake Norman. From the Julius Rosenwald Collection.

⁸⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, February 7, 1983; February 16, 1986.

Children worked hard for their eighth-grade education in the Rosenwald buildings. But they found that schooling offered little opportunity to escape the life of a tenant farmer. "Where we was going, there wasn't much hope," muses Robert Foust. "The only thing a black person could do then was teach a little bit in a black school."⁸⁶

In fact, some of Mecklenburg's leading black citizens taught in the Rosenwald schools. Robert P. Wyche, Jr., served as principal at Murkland School in 1938. His distinguished parents were the Reverend Robert P. Wyche, longtime pastor of the prestigious downtown Seventh Street Presbyterian Church, and Isabella Wyche, Charlotte's first black woman school principal.⁸⁷ James Henry Gunn was another noteworthy Rosenwald teacher. By day he taught mathematics at Clear Creek School and was eventually elevated to principal. Nights and weekends he conducted Jimmy Gunn and His Dixie Serenaders, a popular big band that toured the Southeast and even appeared nationally on radio's "Red Skelton Show."⁸⁸ Eugene Samuel (Genial Gene) Potts also combined teaching with an entertainment career. He taught at the Jonesville School in the late 1930s and served as principal of Billingsville School, 1939-1946. About the same time he debuted on Charlotte's WGIV as the region's first black radio personality.

* * *

Beginning in 1928, the priorities of the Rosenwald foundation changed. Julius Rosenwald was nearing the end of his life, and he hired Edwin R. Embree from the Rockefeller Foundation to take over administration of the fund, which the philanthropist had largely directed himself. Embree rapidly moved the Rosenwald Fund away from school construction and toward investigation and amelioration of a wide array of root problems underlying black equality. "Within a year," wrote Embree, "the Fund's program, originally concerned only with building rural schoolhouses, was enlarged to include aid to high schools and colleges, fellowships to enable Negroes of unusual promise to advance their careers, help to Negro hospitals and health agencies, the development of county library service in the southern states, and activities looking toward the distribution of medical services to persons of moderate means."⁸⁹ Rosenwald grants to North Carolina during the late 1920s and 1930s included pilot programs for rural library service in Mecklenburg

⁸⁶ Spears interview; *Charlotte Observer*, February 16, 1986.

⁸⁷ *Charlotte News*, September 11, 1938; Greenwood, *The Black Experience in Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, section 4, p. 31.

⁸⁸ "History of Schools" notebooks, Communications Office, Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board, Charlotte, hereinafter cited as "History of Schools" notebooks; *Charlotte News*, September 11, 1938; *Charlotte Weekly South*, February 4, 1982. For accounts of a concert and dance by Gunn and his band in Columbia, South Carolina, see the *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia), June 19, July 19, 1937.

⁸⁹ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 33.

and Davidson counties, aid for purchase of school buses in rural areas, and substantial support for the University of North Carolina Press for its "courageous [work] in printing and distributing reports and texts on southern problems."⁹⁰

The shift from schoolhouse construction represented a significant departure. In part, the Rosenwald Fund's new emphasis was attributable to Edwin Embree's personal philosophy. A prolific writer on sociology and race relations, he believed that the newly developing social sciences should be broadly applied to mankind's problems.⁹¹ But the shift was also the result of some hard facts about the school construction program. Despite the improvements brought by the Rosenwald Fund and its thousands of local black contributors, black schools were falling further behind white ones.

Spurred on by the Rosenwald program, North Carolina's investment in black school buildings grew almost fourfold, increasing in value from \$1.28 million in 1919-1920 to \$4.53 million in 1927-1928. But white school boards were upgrading white facilities even faster. In the same years the appraised value of rural white schools rose from \$10.69 million to \$50.05 million, nearly a fivefold increase. Indeed, the ratio between spending for white students and spending for blacks continued to widen. In 1914-1915, for example, North Carolina spent \$2.77 per white pupil for every \$1.00 per black student. In 1932 the ratio had broadened to \$3.11 per white pupil for every \$1.00 per black.⁹²

Edwin Embree kept the schoolhouse grants flowing as long as Julius Rosenwald lived. But when the philanthropist died in 1932, Embree ended the program.⁹³

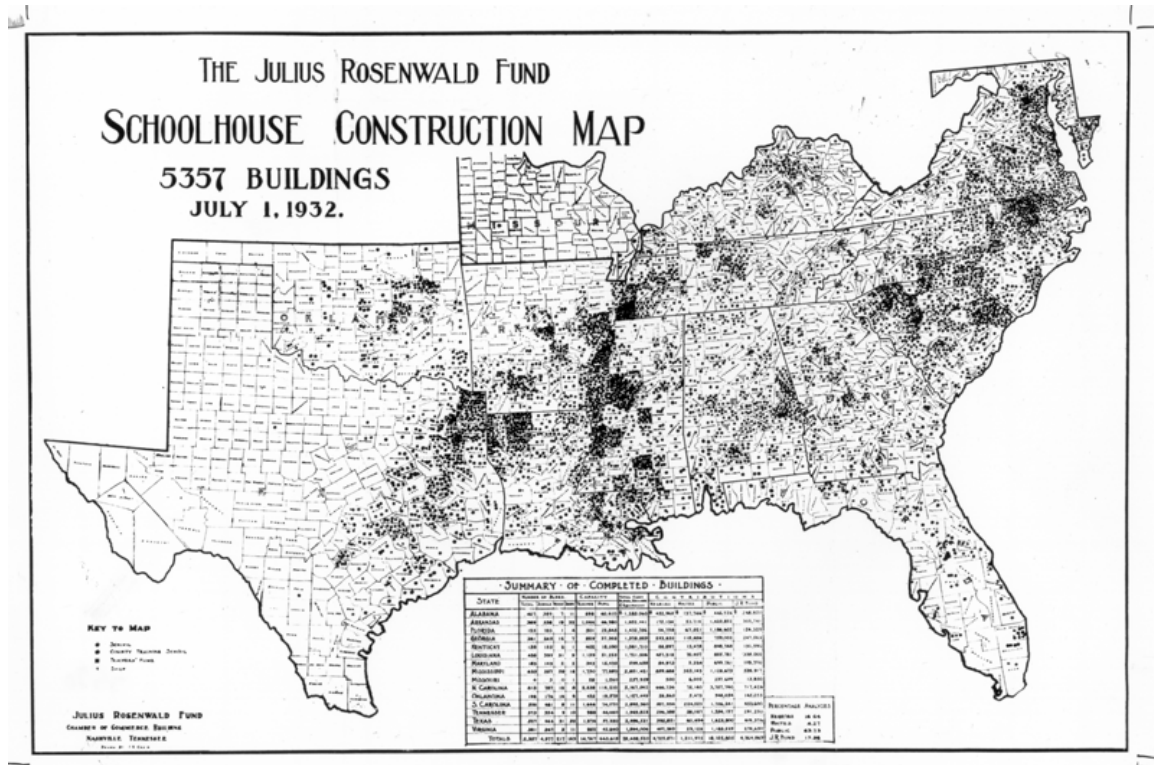
⁹⁰ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 34, 73. The quotation is found in Alfred Gilbert Belles, Tje Julius Rosenwald Fund: Efforts in Race Relations, 1928-1948" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 1972), 53-54. Smith, *Builders of Goodwill*, 106-108; Louis Round Wilson, *County Library Service in the South: A Study of the Rosenwald County Library Demonstrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 81, and see also v-vi. In its first four years, 1928-1932, the school bus program of the fund helped buy sixty-nine vehicles for North Carolina counties. "Negro Education in North Carolina," report, 1933, Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁹¹ See, for example, Edwin R. Embree, *Brown America: The Story of a New Race* (New York: Viking Press, 1931), hereinafter cited as Embree, *Brown America*; Edwin R. Embree, *Prospecting for Heaven: Some Conversations about Science and the Good Life* (New York: Viking Press, 1932). A recent comment on Embree's career is found in John H. Stanfield, *Philanthropy and Jim Crow in American Social Science* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 97-118.

⁹² Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South, from 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 180, hereinafter cited as Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South*; "Public School Buildings," report, ca. 1928, Special Subject File, Division of Negro Education Records.

⁹³ While the decision to phase out school-building grants was made well before the Wall Street disaster of 1929, the sharp decline of the fund's endowment with the stock market crash did hasten Embree's movement away from construction funding. Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 34-35. The demise of the Rosenwald Fund in the 1940s was part of Julius Rosenwald's original plan.

While the Rosenwald Fund continued its many other efforts until 1948, the school-building work closed in July, 1932. In Nashville, Samuel L. Smith kept his office alive for a few years, distributing school plans, but in 1937 closed his doors and turned the plans over to the Interstate School Building Service.⁹⁴ In North Carolina, the Division for Negro Education survived under N. C. Newbold, but without George E. Davis, who soon retired, or William F. Credle, who returned from Nashville to take the position of North Carolina director of schoolhouse planning. Across the South a massive experiment in African American education had ended.



Locations of the 5,357 Rosenwald buildings in fifteen Southern states, July 1, 1932. North Carolina had the largest number. From Report on Schoolhouse Construction, Transportation, and School Libraries to July 31, 1932 (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1932).

"Believing that perpetual endowments could become a hindrance to progress of the present generation," Rosenwald had set a twenty-five-year limit on the activities of the fund. Jerry L. Cross, "Julius Rosenwald: His Fund and His Schools, a Brief Historical Sketch of the Rosenwald Fund and Black Education in the South, 1917-1948," unpublished report, Research Branch, Division of Archives and History, 1980.

⁹⁴ Embree and Waxman *Investment in People*, 52. The Interstate School Building Service was founded with Rosenwald assistance in 1928 to help state school planners share ideas. It became part of the Division of Surveys and Field Services at Peabody College for Teachers. Peabody later merged with Vanderbilt University, and the Division of Surveys is now the Educational Services Department. The Interstate School Building Service evolved into the still-active Interstate School Building Conference, an annual summer gathering in Nashville of school facilities planners from across the United States.

Officially, the Rosenwald Fund discontinued school-building money lest it become "a crutch rather than a stimulus."⁹⁵ To Embree, however, the program had taught a deeper lesson. Public-private partnership was not enough to solve the South's shortcomings in black schooling. By 1935 Embree was actively using the Rosenwald Fund's resources to push for federal aid to education. "The South has an abundance of children but scant material wealth," insisted a widely distributed Rosenwald publication entitled *School Money in Black and White*. "A national equalization of school expenditures would greatly benefit the poorer states.... Federal Funds which are or may be made available for public education should be so distributed so as to guarantee equity and to correct the present glaring inequalities in the use of school funds between the children of the different races."⁹⁶

Federal funds and federal pressure for equality were only part of the answer. "The South is coming to realize that the cost of prejudice and segregation is great both in money and dissipation of energy. There is extra expense in having to maintain two school systems, dual libraries, separate parks," and other segregated facilities, Embree pointed out as early as 1931.⁹⁷ As the years passed he became more blunt: "The Negro does not receive educational opportunity equal to white students of the same community in *any* separate school system . . . Equality of educational opportunity will be fully realized only when segregation is outlawed."⁹⁸

It remained to another generation of Americans to overturn segregation and equalize educational opportunities for blacks, but the Rosenwald schools served as vivid reminders of that era of segregated education more than three decades after the end of the Illinois philanthropist's school building program. In the late 1930s and 1940s Mecklenburg County phased out a few of its smallest Rosenwald schools. But not until the Supreme Court's *Sweatt v. Painter* decision in 1950 did white officials move in earnest to upgrade rural black education. Even then, the last Rosenwald relics did not close until 1966 as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system tried to eliminate substandard schools for blacks before ordered to do so by the courts.⁹⁹ By then the NAACP's legal attack on segregation, Supreme Court rulings, pressure from black parents seeking an equal education for their children, and the increasingly critical scrutiny of federal courts, which culminated in the 1971

⁹⁵ Edwin R. Embree, *Julius Rosenwald Fund: Review for the Two-Year Period 1931-1933* (Chicago: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1933), 31.

⁹⁶ *School Money in Black and White* (Chicago: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1935), unpagged.

⁹⁷ Embree, *Brown America*, 230.

⁹⁸ Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 56.

⁹⁹ J. N. Wilson, "Mecklenburg County Schools, 1944-1960," undated report in the vertical files of the Carolina Room of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, Charlotte, 1, 11; *Charlotte News*, September 11, 1938; *Mecklenburg Times* (Charlotte), June 5, 1952; "History of Schools" notebooks. The city and county systems merged in 1960.

Swann case, spelled an end to the concept of "black schools" and the inequality in facilities that had given rise to the Rosenwald program.¹⁰⁰

* * *

In retrospect, the Rosenwald program had constituted an important, but limited, avenue for the advancement of black education during much of the first half of the twentieth century. As a carefully conceived and well executed effort, of massive scope by private standards, it represented "the most influential philanthropic force that came to aid of Negroes at that time."¹⁰¹ By July 1, 1932, a total of 5,357 Rosenwald schoolhouses, shops, and teacherages stood in 883 counties of fifteen states erected at a total cost of \$28.4 million. The Rosenwald Fund's donation of some \$4.3 million had sparked \$4.7 million in black contributions. Local governments had in turn spent \$18.1 million, 64 percent of the total, with private local white contributions making up the remaining 4 percent. In North Carolina black residents had contributed more than \$666,000 toward the new Rosenwald buildings.¹⁰² Those contributions plus Rosenwald money helped trigger an increase in outlays of public tax money for black education. More of the state's black children now went to school, and they benefited from longer school years and from better trained teachers. In the period 1915-1930 spending per black student increased fivefold in North Carolina.¹⁰³

As an outgrowth of Booker T. Washington's strategy of enlisting philanthropic aid, the Rosenwald classrooms provided generations of black children with real educational opportunities, and a number of the schools operated until after World War II. In 1920, Robert R. Mouton, Washington's successor at Tuskegee, predicted hopefully that the school-building effort would stir within the South an "awakened sense of greater responsibility, not only on the part of public school authorities for Negro education, but ... [by] the people in general for more adequate educational

¹⁰⁰ The struggle for black civil rights is beyond the scope of this article, but key studies of the movement in the 1950s and 1960s include Bernard Schwartz, *Swann's Way: The School Busing Case and the Supreme Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). See also Kluger, *Simple Justice*, and Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston*.

¹⁰¹ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South*, 139. For a similar analysis, see Carter G. Woodson, *The Rural Negro* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930), 180-225.

¹⁰² Embree and Waxman, *Investment in People*, 50-51. The total included 4,977 schools, 217 teacherages, and 163 shops. *Report on Schoolhouse Construction, Transportation, and School Libraries to July 31, 1932* (Nashville, Tennessee: Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1932).

¹⁰³ Bullock, *A History of Negro Education the South*, 180. See also the *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, various years between 1915 and 1930).

provisions for the Negro."¹⁰⁴ At the heart of Washington's philosophy rested the belief that a shift in southern white attitudes toward blacks could be achieved by working within the South's social system. In fact, Washington and Rosenwald had to retain the goodwill of southern whites because philanthropic resources -- large as they were -- were too small to have much effect unless substantially bolstered by local white appropriations. Philanthropists could offer incentives for white-controlled school boards to increase appropriations for blacks but could impose no sanctions if they did not. Nor was there any way for blacks, stripped of political power through disfranchisement, to bring pressure on white lawmakers.

So the Rosenwald Fund took care not to offend elite white southern propriety and made no direct challenge to segregation. Even when the fund urged states to hire black officials, it specified that black Rosenwald agents would literally labor in the field while white Rosenwald agents received opportunities for higher education and advancement. And, until the late 1920s, the fund emphasized strengthening elementary school offerings rather than adding opportunities for high school. By providing eighth-grade educations, supplemented by "industrial" classes in farming and home economics, Rosenwald schools educated students to be good farmers, instead of giving them the capability to leave rural life. Ultimately, by 1932, Rosenwald Fund officials had concluded that the transformation in black education anticipated by Washington and his followers had not occurred and that his method of conciliation and cooperation was not the route to deep social change. Consequently, they ended the Rosenwald schoolhouse grants.

Today the Rosenwald school buildings that still survive in North Carolina and across the South stand as a testament to African Americans' tenacious pursuit of education. The structures also symbolize the short-term efficacy of public-private partnership, as well as the limitations of such "volunteerism." Despite the significant improvements to black education made by the Rosenwald Fund, it nevertheless remained for the NAACP's legal challenges and the powerful intervention of the federal government in the 1950s-1970s to win a measure of real success in providing equal educational opportunities for African Americans.

¹⁰⁴ Dresslar, *Report on the Rosenwald School Buildings*, 4.