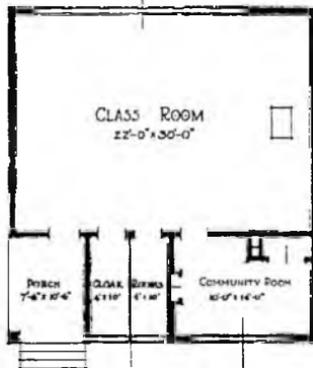


THREE DOLLARS

VOLUME XXVII, No. 4
WINTER 2001

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY OF LOCAL ARCHITECTURE AND PRESERVATION



FLOOR PLAN
COMMUNITY SCHOOL - PLAN - NO. 1
TO FACE EAST OR WEST END

THE ROSENWALD PLAN: ARCHITECTURE FOR EDUCATION

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Cover: Plan and perspective of a Rosenwald One-Room Community School from Samuel Smith's booklet, Community School Plans, circa 1920.

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THE ROSENWALD PLAN: ARCHITECTURE FOR EDUCATION

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Editorial Note: The format for documentation and citation in this issue follows the most recent updates of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Any publishing issues follow The Chicago Manual of Style.

From the Editor

The previous issue of the *Quarterly* focused on one man's impact on Huntsville through his varied building projects; this issue looks at one man's building project that affected many young, rural children of the South. Nancy Rohr interviewed many of the children who attended Rosenwald Schools in Alabama for her article. Now, as adults, they look back fondly on the simple days when a school was a place for community, education and the joy of learning.

Unlike the buildings of Oscar Hundley, most of the Rosenwald Schools are gone. So the ability to visit these structures, to touch the slate chalkboards, to sit in the wooden desks worn smooth by little hands and smell the smoke from the warm potbellied stove, is not possible. Likewise, existing photographs and plans provide only the briefest impressions of the schools as they were intended to be built, as they looked upon completion, or as they appeared after 40 years of use. Photographs and drawings do not echo with the yells of children at recess or the murmur of students reciting lessons.

The memories of the former students and educators, however, may at least suggest the emotion and experience of going to school in the simple wood architecture of the Rosenwald Schools.

These same students and educators who benefitted from the Rosenwald Fund were mostly African-Americans, living in the rural areas of the South in the early 1900s. The educational system was almost nonexistent at the time. In 1912, Wilcox County, AL, for example, spent \$17 per capita for white students and only \$0.37 per capita for black children. This money went for a teacher and a few books; classes met in homes or churches on a haphazard schedule. Once the Rosenwald Fund began providing for buildings, the states began to take action as well. In 1916, the Alabama legislature passed law providing for construction of black schools with state funding.

The care and involvement each community devoted to its school was apparent in the names given to the buildings. Most were named after the individual who donated the largest parcel of land or led the drive to obtain funding. Some communities took a more poetic approach and

gave the schools colorful names such as Thankful, Peace and Good Will, Godsend, and Rough and Ready.

And a final issue worth noting: terms used to designate various races have changed over time as often as methods of education have done. Throughout this issue, the terms *black*, *colored*, *African-American* and *Negro* are used; the last was used during the 1900s by Rosenwald—and both black and white societies of the day—to denote those of African-American heritage. Each term has been applied where appropriate and should not be seen as a term of separatism, but of simple clarification.

—Heather A. Cross



Farmer's Capital Primary Grades, Spring 1951—Our heritage is sometimes saved for us by random acts. William E. Popejoy, who served the Madison County Board of Education for nearly 50 years, gave many local pictures to co-worker Delia Jenkins when he was cleaning out his desk. Mrs. Jenkins, a retired teacher, happened to enjoy arranging pictures in scrapbooks for her family and friends. She gave this particular scrapbook of school pictures to Friends of the Library, where, by good fortune, it was taken upstairs to the Archives of the Heritage Room to become a part of all our heritage.

The Rosenwald Plan: Architecture for Education

Nancy Rohr

The Rosenwald Plan helped fund rural black schools in the South from 1913 to 1937. At a time when education was seen by most as a luxury, the communities that took advantage of the Rosenwald Plan gave their children opportunities and experiences that have since become synonymous with the simple wood schoolhouse. One of these communities was right here—in Madison County, AL.

Rural Southern Education: History and Background

Schooldays for southern rural children often spark fond memories of a simpler, golden time. The day might have started and ended the same for most children: the hustle of gathering up schoolwork and lunch and leaving the house to join friends on the way to school, listening to the bell calling to hurry up—or to drag one’s feet, prolonging the doom of homework not prepared.

The darkened cloakroom retained the smell of damp coats and the excitement of dark places. Each morning formally started with the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, demanding recitation of words that were sometimes as difficult to pronounce as to understand. At least the heartfelt “thank you” prayer was more simple to grasp.

Rural children assembled in a one-room schoolhouse, cold in the winter and hot in the summer, with a water bucket and dipper out back. Still farther out back was the privy. The children sat two to a desk, where the serious work of reading, writing, ’rithmetic and recitation filled the day. The spirit of competition prevailed each Friday with the weekly spelling bee.

Recess brought freedom again—all the outside games seemed to involve running and shouting. There was no playground equipment; no one expected any. A rock wrapped in rags and tied tightly became a ball, and jacks were played with smooth pebbles. If a shade tree was nearby, on warm days the children could enjoy eating lunches brought from home.

Often, the teacher prudently read aloud to let the younger children rest and recover. Later, walking home always took longer than the morning trip to school. Notes were compared, girls giggled, boys kicked stones along the way and there was much skipping and laughter.

There was a sense of comfort and continuity about the day's routine. The teacher always knew each child. She knew the brothers and sisters, and even the parents, who had come before. She knew what church was—or was not—attended. Most likely she knew which families were having a more difficult time than usual making ends meet. And of course, she always knew which boys had a crush on her.

The setting for African-American education, particularly in the rural South, was certainly inadequate at the beginning of the 20th century. While some children were privately taught, it was against the law prior to the Civil War to teach slaves to read or write (except in Tennessee). The Freedmen's Bureau, created by the federal government during the War, maintained segregation and minimal educational quality for African-American children. By 1870, however, funds were lacking, and before long, the Bureau's responsibilities were taken over by individual states (Bond).

City school children may have fared better, but rarely were regular school buildings provided for rural students. Generally, African-American schools were housed in local churches and lodge halls. Supplies were sparse or nonexistent—as was true for rural white schools as well.

As in most rural locations, a teacher with any high school education was considered more than well qualified. Some teachers were hired just to fill available spaces, without proper credentials but at least—it was hoped—with a sincere desire to educate children. Teachers often boarded in the neighborhood with a welcoming family, but this arrangement inevitably added to that family's financial burden, with perhaps a little less food to go around the table at mealtime.

School sessions were short, usually two to four months at the most. In the winter, older boys gathered brush before the school day started and the girls carried it inside. Before the county took on the responsibility, parents supplied much-needed wood or coal for the stove, but there

wasn't always enough to heat the building. Former students recall wearing their coats all day to stay warm.

Some communities were able to sponsor summer school for two months when there was no regular school. However, as recently as 1954, all rural schools in Madison County were on a "cotton picking" schedule, and classes were discontinued until the cotton crop was harvested (*Heritage and History*).

The children may not have recognized the sacrifices made by parents and leaders in the community to provide them with schooling, but for some, it was the only formal structure of their young lives. Times were hard; they had always *been* hard. Parents and teachers hoped to provide a way for the boys and girls to better themselves and perhaps prepare for a brighter tomorrow. School days were often very different for black and white children of the rural South—and they were often alike.

The Rosenwald Plan

In the early 1900s, men of great wealth and social compassion emerged as leaders in the United States. A Golden Age of Philanthropy appeared with some of these industrial giants. The fortunes shared by Carnegie, Rockefeller, McCormick, Guggenheim, Duke, DuPont and Kellogg had a profound influence on giving and endowments in this country. Among the newly mega-rich was the son of German-Jewish immigrants who had settled in Springfield, IL. Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932) was to change the perception of gift-giving in America even more.



Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932)—
Photo circa 1931. Courtesy
Chicago Tribune. <http://www.tribads.com/tribute/bio30.html>.

At the age of 63, Rosenwald reached the peak of his business career, becoming president of Sears, Roebuck & Company. Acts of philanthropy became, in effect, his second career (Stein). Rosenwald had a

deep passion for this country and witnessed its transformation by technology. He “saw himself as a public servant, the temporary steward of treasure entrusted to him for the purpose of bettering the world” (Embree 13, 24). Moreover, Rosenwald felt “governmental support would only lead to permanent dependence and a cycle of even deeper poverty” (Dalin 4, 37).

In accordance, Rosenwald gave to a far-reaching range of charities, including numerous worldwide Jewish organizations. He initiated and was the principal contributor to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. His philanthropical gifts included grants for hospitals and universities. He helped subsidize the building of YMCAs for segregated blacks and provided dental clinics in public schools. Rosenwald’s major effort, however, involved construction of schools for African-Americans in the rural South.

Rosenwald had read Booker T. Washington’s autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, and was particularly impressed with the concept of self-help and action. Washington had written that “the actual sight of a first-class house that a Negro has built is ten times more potent than pages of discussion about a house that he ought to build, or perhaps could build” (Werner 115).

Already having concluded that “it was always better to help people become gainfully employed than to give them alms” (Dalin 37), Rosenwald intended to promote self-reliance and self-help—not to become a supporter of the welfare state. Much later, in 1930, he wrote, “real endowments are not money, but ideas” (“Trend...” 749).

At Washington’s invitation, Rosenwald visited Tuskegee Institute in Alabama at the beginning of the 20th century. He was impressed with the energetic progress he saw there.

Rosenwald understood the education movement for African-Americans, particularly in the rural environment, to be passive and stagnant. Reports from the time state that “in Alabama, a state where half the population was black, only 20 percent of the black children were enrolled in school as compared with 60 percent of white children,” and “in all the South there was not a single standard 8th grade rural Negro public school” nor any formal high school (Dalin 38). Teachers in the

African-American schools averaged an 8th grade education, and their annual salary in many states was less than \$150 (Embree 38). But at Tuskegee, Rosenwald perceived the “energy and achievement” that was possible with local commitment and effort (Mansell 2).

Within a year, Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington developed a plan to make matching grants available to rural communities for education, gearing those grants toward people who wanted to help themselves and would become integral partners in the system. According to the plan, two acres of land had to be deeded for the school and the matching funds raised before construction could start. Unless the land was donated, it was often difficult for tenant farmers of modest means to purchase the acreage and raise the cash for construction of the building.

In spite of the struggle, Rosenwald agreed by 1913 to give \$300 to each of six one-room schools in Alabama that met this criterion—and nearly 100 more buildings quickly followed. The enterprise worked so well that the Rosenwald School Building Fund was formally incorporated in 1917. The Fund remained relatively modest until 1927, when Rosenwald increased the Fund’s endowment to \$20 million with a gift of Sears & Roebuck stock.

With this extensive gift, one condition was imposed: the Fund would spend itself out of existence no later than 25 years after his death, thus avoiding what he called “the Dead Hand in Philanthropy.” His concept was designed to prevent the officers and trustees from becoming preoccupied merely with conserving capital. They would “not have time to grow stale, nor to build themselves into self-promoting bureaucracy” (“Principles...” 600). He recognized that social conditions change too rapidly to store up large sums of money for the future. His fund would serve the needs of the day, and future generations would provide for their own needs as they arose (Embree 208, 31).

Altogether, an astounding 5,358 buildings were erected in 883 counties of 15 Southern states with the aid of the Rosenwald Fund. This number includes school buildings, teachers’ homes and vocational training facilities. In 1913, even before the Fund was solidified, the first school was constructed in Nostasulga, AL—twelve miles from Tuskegee (“How Firm...”). A second room soon had to be added because of overcrowding.

The next 78 schools built were in Alabama, with the total number in this state eventually reaching 382 schools in 64 of 67 counties (“How Firm..”). Northern Alabama communities were able to build seven schools in Lauderdale County, five in Limestone, three in Jackson, eight in Colbert, four in Lawrence, two each in Morgan and Franklin, one in Marshall and nine in Madison County.

In the latter county, four of the schools were one-room buildings. Five had two rooms. Costs ranged from \$850 at Graysom to \$3,700 at Toney (Mansell 52, 54-59). In 1916, the state legislature offered public money for black schools that amounted to half of that raised by local communities.

Washington and Rosenwald had hoped for more cooperation toward their building plan. They had hoped that seeing the efforts of the blacks to better their communities would change the entrenched attitudes and behavior of many Southern whites.

Rosenwald had always had two goals in funding black educational needs. First, he wanted “to stimulate public agencies to take a larger share of social responsibility.” He also hoped “to spur a pattern of cooperation that would bring about lasting change, well beyond the life of the grant for schoolhouse construction.[...] 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” (Hanchett 398). Unfortunately, this was not the way it would be; only 4 percent of total funding came from private white contributions and Madison County’s white contribution was only slightly higher (Hanchett 426; Mansell 57).

Booker T. Washington’s view of schooling for blacks is today often seen as merely a limited means of advancement. Washington felt that once basic education skills were taught to all children, any continued education mandated then-typical roles. Rural education past the 8th grade—for black *and* white children—was generally considered unnecessary unless one planned to teach or, even more rarely, to enter a profession.

Rosenwald agreed that industrial education and domestic or agricultural science were the only futures possible for poor rural children.

Table 1: Funding of Rosenwald Schools-Madison County, AL

School	Type (# of teachers)	Cost (\$)	Contributions(\$)			
			Negro	White	Public	Rosenwald
Conyers	2	1,300	550	--	450	300
Councill	2	3,200	1,600	--	900	700
Farmer's	1	1,650	900	100	450	200
Graysom	1	850	300	--	150	400
Horton	1	950	350	--	300	300
Mt. Carmel	2	1,050	450	--	300	300
Mt. Lebanon	2	3,050	1,500	--	950	600
Silver Hill	1	950	350	--	300	300
Toney	2	3,700	1,150	900	1,000	700

Source: Julius Rosenwald Papers. Nashville, TN: Fisk University Library Special Collections; Mansell and Binkley 24, 57.

Editor's Note: The funding and cost of each Madison County Rosenwald School varied according to need, population and year. The "Type" column indicates not only the number of teachers, but the number of classrooms in each case.

Boys were taught farm mechanics and agriculture to be better farmers. Girls were educated about home health, sewing and cooking to be better wives for the farmers. Many of the larger schools maintained a shop or home arts room. The two acres of land mandated by Rosenwald for the matching funds made farm gardens available on the property.

By 1932, Rosenwald had contributed \$4.4 million to build schools for rural black children; blacks contributed \$4.7 million; government funds matched \$18.1 million and other foundations provided \$1.2 million (Wooster).

Julius Rosenwald died in 1932. The construction of new school buildings officially ceased that year.

In his lifetime, it is estimated Rosenwald shared between \$60 million and \$70 million with various social causes (Embree 15). At the time of his death, there were outpourings of affection and sadness from around the world.

The Rosenwald program, which began its achievements in Alabama, was a milestone in black rural southern education. The Rosenwald Fund sparked an energy to provide the means for thousands of children to have their first opportunity for regular attendance in school. Perhaps even more importantly, the program ignited activity on the part of parents to work toward education for the future of their children.

Though the buildings have all but disappeared, the nine completed schools in Madison County—and their living legacy—represented sacrifices of love and pride.

Nancy Rohr is a former teacher and tutor. She holds a B.A. in Elementary Education from Marshall University and a M.A. in Reading Education from Alabama A&M. As a researcher of local history, she has been published in the magazines Silver, Alabama Heritage, Historic Huntsville Review and the Quarterly. Ms. Rohr would like to thank Shelia Gilbreath of Interlibrary Loan at the Huntsville Public Library for her assistance.

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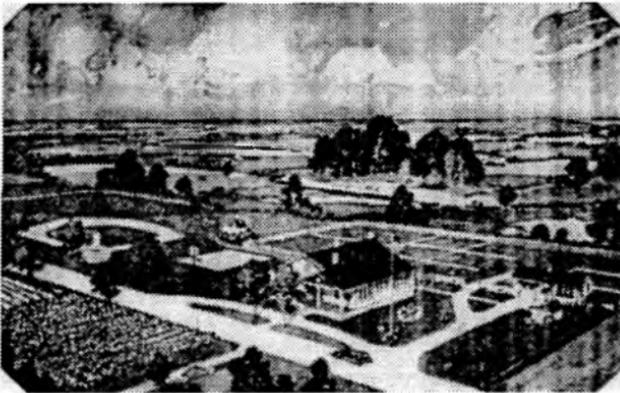
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The Architecture of Rosenwald Schools

The earliest Rosenwald Schools were built under the guidance of local carpenters. They built what they knew; styles and structures resembled other buildings in the area. The farm and church vernacular was adapted to what the community considered appropriate for a school. Many of these structures, although funded through Rosenwald, looked nothing like the Rosenwald Schools that have been identified.

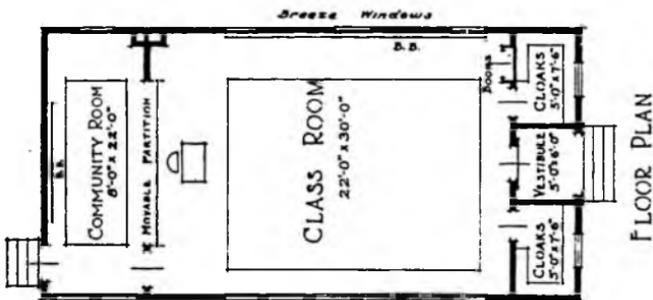
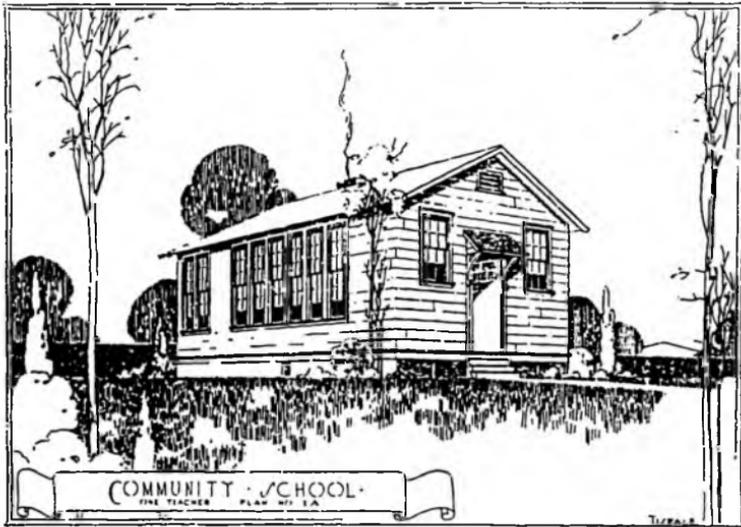
In 1920, as the Rosenwald Fund gathered momentum, flaws appeared in some school construction projects. To alleviate problems, Samuel Leonard Smith became General Field Agent with headquarters in Nashville. Smith, a highly trained educator, developed floor plans and specifications for a variety of school needs. He published his standardized building designs in 1924, in a small booklet called *Community School Plans* (Mansell & Binkley 29).

These detailed layouts did away with the need for architect's fees, further reducing costs, and the plans became so popular that white communities as well as black soon adopted his approach. The pamphlet included contractor's specifications; the floor plans included bills of material. Parents and concerned citizens would know exactly how much material was needed (121 bags of Portland cement, three kegs of



*Ideal Site Layout for Rosenwald School Grounds—
The site plan from Smith's booklet includes a four-room
shop to the right of the school and teacher housing
across the street. Courtesy Mansell & Binkley.*

commercial nails, 166 linear feet of metal gutters, etc.). Smith even included designs for teachers' homes and sanitary school privies, as well as suggestions for selecting and developing each site.



ONE-TEACHER
 COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLAN NO I-A
 TO FACE NORTH OR SOUTH ONLY

The typical building was roughly a 20-foot-by-40-foot rectangular unit—simple and functional, with exterior hints of Colonial Revival or Craftsman detailing.

Weatherboard, a style of overlapping wood siding, was the finish of choice for the wood frame structures. Smith suggested three exterior

color schemes: “White trimmed in gray or gray trimmed in white or cream 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).

All schools contained a brick chimney for fire safety, a cloak room and a space for industrial activities (either an additional room or a separate building, depending on community). Every school building of two or more teachers included movable doors, allowing rooms to be opened into a large auditorium for use as a community center.

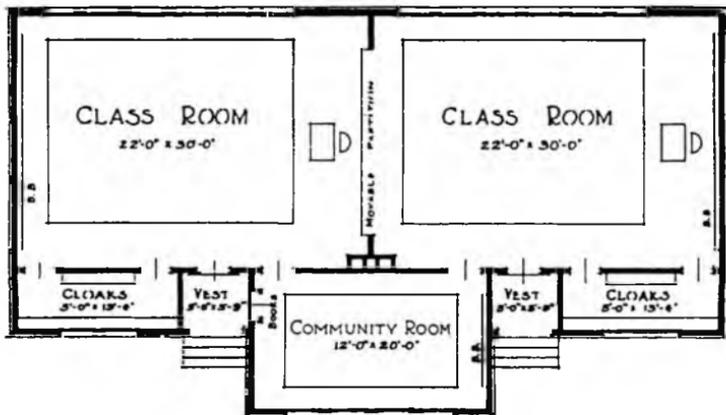
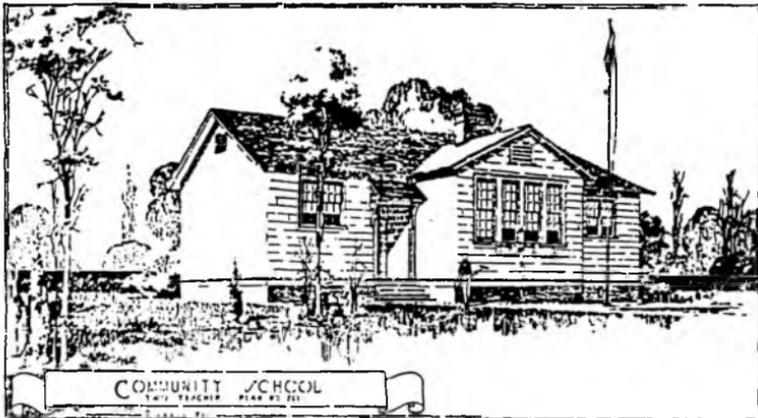
The most noticeable feature, however, was the use of natural lighting; electricity was generally not available in the rural South at the time. Smith incorporated the lighting and heating designs of Fletcher B. Dresslar, his teacher and mentor. The sets of multiple double-hung windows, which take full advantage of the east-west light, make the Rosenwald schools immediately recognizable today (Mansell 28-30).

The buildings were sited so that southern exposure was limited, to avoid excessive heat, and to account for the inability to ventilate when windows were shaded. The shades for the east and west windows were tan in color, eliminating heat absorption caused by traditional dark green shades. The interior color schemes available—“cream ceiling with buff walls and walnut trim or an ivory ceiling with light gray walls and walnut stained trim”—increased reflection of light and kept the rooms from feeling small (Hanchett). The desks were to be placed so that windows were to the left of the students, preventing shadows from their writing arms (assuming, of course, that all writers were right-handed). Most modern classrooms are still arranged as Smith suggested, despite the use of electric lighting.

By the 1950s, rural workers began to migrate to better jobs in the northern cities. Rural population declined. Improved roads and school buses allowed for a more efficient system, and school consolidation became the trend for those who remained on the farms. Integration gathered large numbers of school children from a distance into single large buildings. The use of small neighborhood schoolhouses, including Rosenwald schools, fell by the wayside. Though many of the buildings survived as community centers, most were simply abandoned over

time, used for community storage or dismantled to salvage lumber and other reusable construction elements.

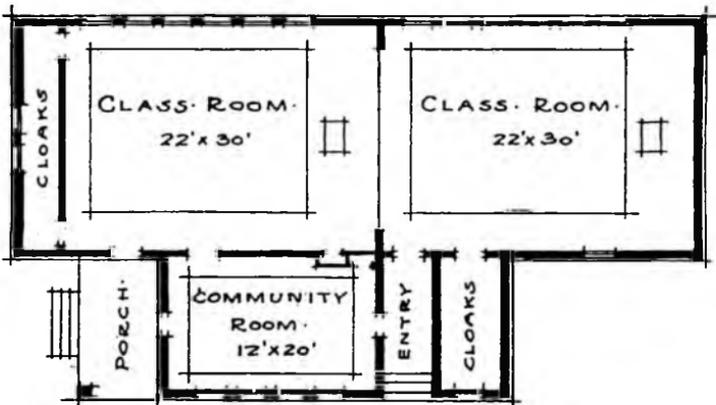
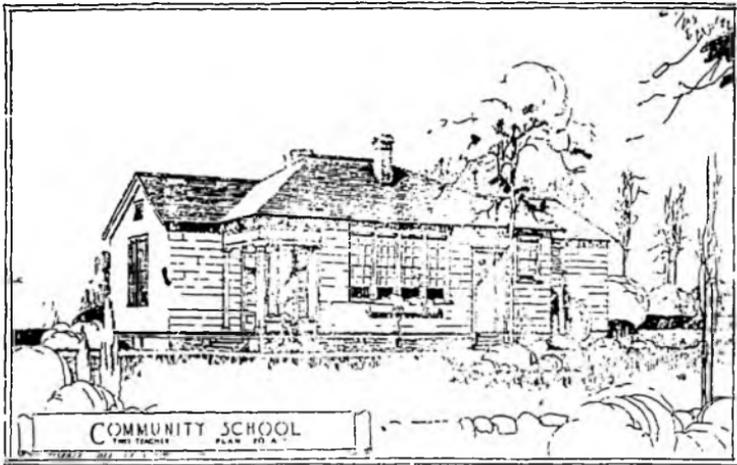
Throughout the South, a few buildings have survived. Currently in use are Rosenwald Schools in Panama City, FL; Rosenwald St. David School in Darlington, SC; Rosenwald Elementary in Society Hill, SC; Rosenwald Dunbar in Nicholasville, KY; and Rosenwald Elementary in



FLOOR PLAN No 20
TWO TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY

South Bay, FL. These schools are alive and well with web sites on the Internet.

In North Carolina, locals are trying to raise money to save the former Walnut Cove Colored Elementary and the London School at Walnut Grove.



· FLOOR PLAN No. 20-A ·
· COMMUNITY SCHOOL ·
TO FACE NORTH OR SOUTH ONLY.

Closer to home, a rare brick Rosenwald building remains in western Colbert County, AL. Leighton Training School was built in 1929 on 11 acres. The school later became the basis for Leighton Middle School. It closed in 1993.

Still performing its mission, Cherokee Middle School in Cherokee, AL, has a web site and continues to educate children.

The architectural impact of Rosenwald's fund and Smith's plans helped insure an equality of school experience that is reflected in former students' memories. The simple structures did not pretend to be ostentatious monuments, but were buildings that provided a space for children to grow, to learn and to be part of their community in comfort.

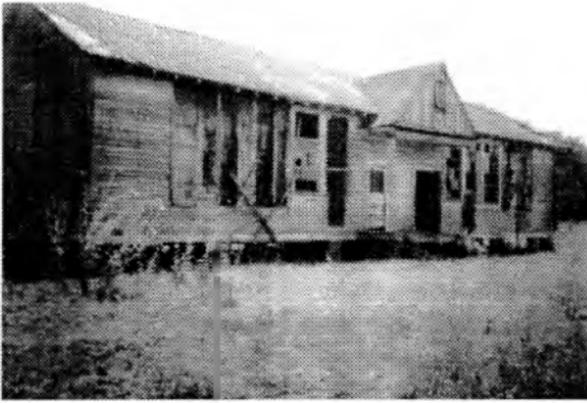
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Jeanes Schools

Other organizations and individuals showed concern with the education of rural black children before and during the years of the Rosenwald Plan. The United Presbyterian Church maintained several missions with educational centers in Alabama's Black Belt counties, and, accordingly, few Rosenwald schools were built in that area.

Another active benefactor, Henry H. Rogers of the Standard Oil Company, worked with Booker T. Washington from 1905 to 1919 to build schools in the South with gifts of money matched by the local black communities.



*Little Elk School—A Jeanes funded school in Limestone County, AL, that adapted Rosenwald plans and added a simple temple-front entrance porch.
Photo Nancy Rohr.*

In 1907 Anna T. Jeanes, a Philadelphia Quaker, consulted with Washington about her educational concerns. She was interested both in small rural black schools and recruitment and management of competent teachers to staff them.

Miss Jeanes noted that no one in the state educational hierarchies appeared to be responsible for guidance of the teachers at black schools. She established a \$1 million fund for this kind of supervision. Basically, experienced black educators supervised novice teachers in the field.

Jeanes' plan was similar to one in Virginia that offered demonstrations of good teaching, and this idea expanded to the concept of countywide leadership. The Jeanes Fund also eventually evolved into a position for an Assistant Superintendent in charge of Negro schools in many states. By 1913, when Rosenwald was beginning his efforts, there were already 16 Jeanes teachers in 17 Alabama counties (Bond 269-271).

The goals of the two funds worked well together. If not enough cash was raised to build a Rosenwald School, the Jeanes teachers held a rally and helped raise the necessary money with a raffle or a picnic in the community. In one town, farmers committed a small plot of land planted in cotton—the “Rosenwald Patch.” They donated the proceeds to the school building fund (Stein 14). Jeanes supervisors first campaigned to urge church congregations to finance a proposed school near their place of worship. After all, black children in a rural setting were most likely already attending classes in a church building. In fact, despite the influx of capital from the Rosenwald and Jeanes Funds, 60 percent of black schools in Madison County continued to meet in local churches, in less than optimal conditions (*History* 7).

It was not easy to overcome resistance in the community on two fronts. Older blacks often were uneasy about change—what had been good enough for them, they reasoned, was good enough for their children. On the other hand, Southern whites saw little reason to cooperate. Why help “coloreds” build a better school than they themselves might have attended as children? The task was formidable.



Little Elk School—The cloakrooms, the small stage, and four chalkboards are still standing where Mrs. Louise Lochart and Mrs. Minnie B. Yarbrough taught. Vestiges of the interior color scheme can still be seen and the two-seat student desks are still stored in the attic. Photo Nancy Rohr.

In 1939, in nearby Limestone County, the Little Elk schoolhouse was built. This one-story, two-room, wood frame school, inspired by the Rosenwald program and supervised by Jeanes funding, was the first in its area built specifically for black children. Though the structure clearly retains its basic look, today the building is used merely for hay storage. (Note: The site recently has been placed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. Funding efforts are now underway to relocate the building to property offered by the Little Elk Missionary Baptist Church.)

In Madison County, a Jeanes Meeting was held once a month. All black teachers attended. Early administrators are unknown, but from 1944-1952, Mattie Jordan Phillips served in the capacity. The Jeanes Fund paid one-half of her salary.

By the time Addison Fields assumed the duties of supervisor in 1953, Jeanes funding was depleted. The program was over.

In due time, all the one-teacher schools were consolidated; 3,500 black children would soon be served by 25 teachers spread throughout 40 schools.

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Rosenwald Schools in Madison County

Many communities applied to and were approved by the Rosenwald Fund, but records show that many failed—for whatever reasons—to complete the agreement, and were canceled. Those that completed the agreement began building schools in Madison County in 1913.

The following includes historical information drawn from school and town records, as well as the recollections of those individuals who attended them during their childhood.

Conyers School

Conyers School received approval from the Rosenwald Fund about 1913, when Tom Conyers made the property available for sale. This two-teacher school at Gurley was found where the eastern side of Section Line Road meets Hereford Road today. As more children attended, the building grew to include three rooms and another, smaller

chamber was also utilized as a make-shift classroom.



Eventually, the building also served as the community's junior high school and a meeting place for youth activities such as Boy Scouts (*Historical...Scouting*). In 1957, Conyers School became part of the consolidation of several schools at Brownsboro.

Conyers School—The building was used as the Conyer Junior High at the time this photo was taken. Photo courtesy of The Huntsville/Madison County Public Library (H/MCPL).

T. David Freeman, later mayor of Gurley, recalls attending his first 10

years of school at Conyers Rosenwald, from 1936 to 1946. He and his sister walked the three miles to and from school until his father got the job driving the school bus. The boys gathered brush for kindling in the winter and laid the fire for the next morning. His teacher for the first three grades, Lillian McCrary, began each morning with a devotion.

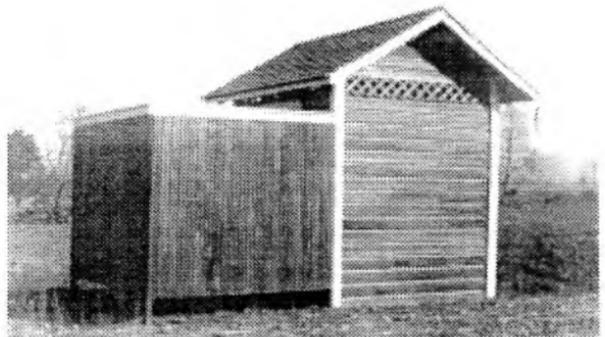
At recess, the boys often fashioned a homemade softball and batted with a sturdy stick. Freeman recalls that he might have been the best marble shooter, but admits there weren't a lot of the old boys around to argue with him about that. The girls played hopscotch and other games. The children ate their noon meal inside at their desks; Freeman carried peanut butter and crackers for lunch, but would trade for whatever might prove interesting in another boy's lunch bag.

The traditional subjects were covered at Conyers, he says. Poetry and Bible verses were memorized, and at the weekly spelling bee everyone competed intensely. All the children wanted to excel, to be considered smart. Parents encouraged that attitude, and poor grades were just unacceptable at home.

Councill Rosenwald School

The two-room, two-teacher Councill Rosenwald School was built during the 1925-1926 budget year, on two acres of land. Grades 1-6 were taught in the frame building, which originally was situated northwest of

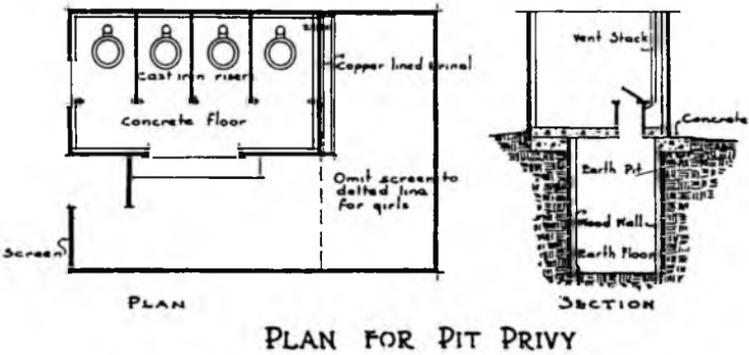
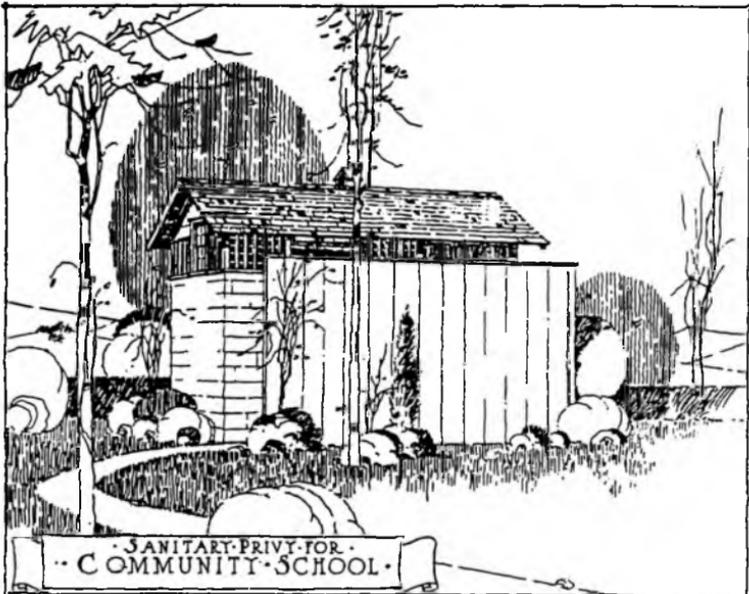
Alabama A&M University's Palmer Hall. The building is still on A&M's campus, now found west of Meridianville Road at the ROTC Center. Dedicated teachers and administrators Luvenia Minor, Mabel Winston, Mabel Powell, Mrs.



Councill School Privy—The brown stain with white trim and use of wood can be seen on the school's three-hole privy. Courtesy Fisk University.

McIntire (first name unknown), Dorothy Roberts Simpson, Reva White, Thomas McCrary, Georgia True, Ruby Briggs and Eva Bell instilled high standards for the children (*Councill Reunion 9*).

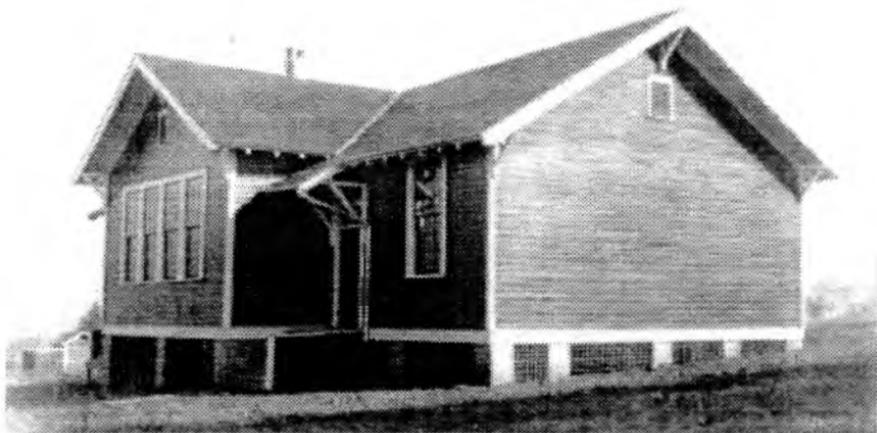
Councill Rosenwald combined six grades into three rooms: grades 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6, respectively, and hired a third teacher to turn its large storage room into the third classroom. Later, more rooms were added.



Like all the Rosenwald schools, Councill had a carefully constructed outdoor privy, reflecting the Fund's concern with proper sanitary measures. There were three separate, enclosed stalls under one roof (a "three-holer," in the vernacular of the day). A covered entryway enabled children to stay out of the rain while waiting their turn.

Councill Rosenwald School should not be confused with other Councill schools in the area: the City of Huntsville Councill School (circa 1892) situated on what is now St. Clair Street, next to the library; the Meridian Street Councill Training School built in 1948; and a County Councill School. All the Councill schools were named for educator and A&M founder William Hooper Councill, a former slave.

Valiene Crutcher Battle remembers walking the two miles from Winchester Road, west of what is now Memorial Parkway, down the graveled Meridianville Pike with her brothers and sisters. She and her siblings were pleased to be going to school. They were well fed and clothed, clean and happy to be learning to read and write. Discipline was seldom a problem at school, she says, because all the children knew their parents might walk in at any time to see what they were doing. If a spanking became necessary, it was done in the cloakroom and out of sight—but not out of hearing.



Councill School— Original 1925-26. Note how building is built on brick piers to level floor without having to grade site. Piers also kept termite and moisture damage from the wood structure. Courtesy Fisk University

On rainy or really cold days, if the crops were “laid-by,” a parent from the neighborhood would hitch a mule to the wagon and come for the children in the afternoon. Books, pencil, and paper were shouldered proudly in a satchel, Battle says, likely made by mother. Lunch was biscuits with ham or sausage, and carried in a brown paper bag.

Battle particularly enjoyed when the teacher, Miss Winston, appointed her to be the monitor to keep the children quiet if the teacher had to leave the room. All the rooms were crowded, but everyone received enough attention to learn reading, printing and cursive writing. The children were urged to do the best they could and continue in school.

School met everyone’s needs, she recalls, and parents were thrilled. Plus, students at Councill were “special” because of the proximity to the college. They had field trips to the A&M campus, excursions to the home economics department and, of course, they shared tears when the home of classmate Harold Drake burned. Harold’s father was president of A&M at that time; his family lived at the famous Green Bottom Inn on campus. Battle continued her two-mile walk throughout her school years and on into her first years of college.

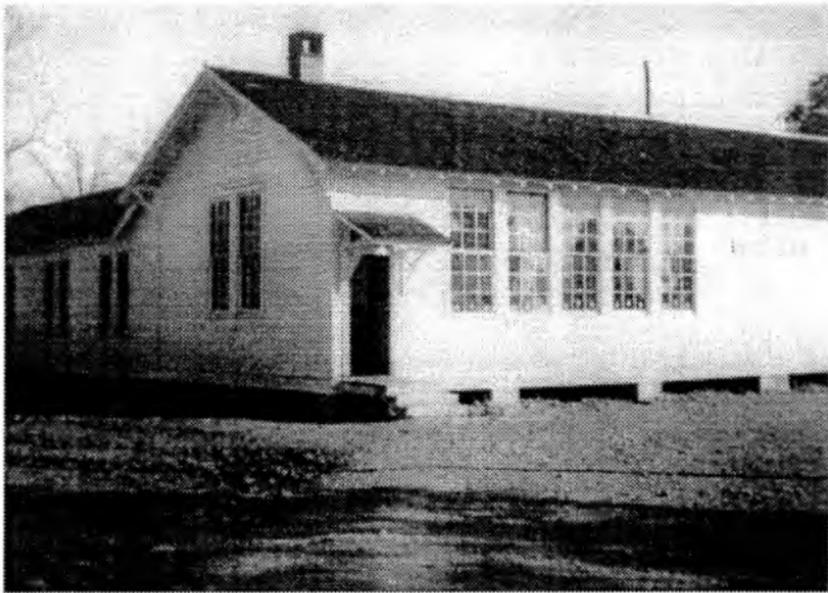
Farmer’s Capital School

Farmer’s Capital School in the New Market area of Madison County became a reality in 1928, when Garth Humphrey and his neighbors raised \$700. The County added \$200, meeting the required amount of \$900. This allowed the County to secure \$450 from state (public) matching funds.

Garth and Bertha Humphrey led the way. Two other brothers and their wives were



Farmer’s Capital Upper Grades classroom— Notice the sliding panel doors between rooms behind the boy who has collected coats. Spring 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.



***Farmer's Capital School**—This building was eventually moved across the road and renamed Moore's Mill School. Recently the name was changed to Lynn Fanning School. Although it was used for Head Start programs, none of the original building remains. 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.*

involved—Eddie and his wife Mynthe and Orlando Humphrey and his wife Mattie. Together they deeded two acres of land for the school. Their father Burrel Humphrey, a carpenter and brick mason, began construction on the one-room school. Later, a second classroom was added. Adding to their contributions, Bertha and Garth Humphrey often boarded the teachers in their home; the latter remained a school trustee for several years (*History 1-6; Heritage 259*).

As a result of his family's contributions, Lloyd Humphrey didn't have far to walk to school in the late 1940s. Today, he still recalls the two classrooms with dividing doors in the center, which would be opened for plays and entertainment. Cloakrooms were at each end; Humphrey muses that whatever happened among students that they didn't want the teacher to know about, happened in the cloakroom.)

The county provided coal for the potbelly stove, which became red-hot by afternoon. In the winter, two boys were sent to get kindling for the following morning. Sometimes a penny was collected from each child

so the fire could be started early, permitting the teacher to begin the day with a warm room. At recess, Humphrey remembers, the boys wrestled and played marbles, hopscotch, tag and baseball in the spring.

Miss Gribby was a favorite teacher, he says. She did a fantastic job in a crowded environment, which she expected the children to help keep clean and orderly. She was a well-prepared teacher who was strictly in charge, and what she said was law in her room. She seldom threatened her pupils with a switch, and never embarrassed a child for poor work; nor would she allow any child to be humiliated about poor clothes or “country” manners. She might, however, sometimes take a child into the cloakroom with her comb or a damp cloth to help them tidy up.

All the children were encouraged to work hard and do their best, Humphrey recalls. As a result, many of Miss Grisby’s students went on to college. Humphrey himself went on to become a teacher and principal at several Madison County schools.

Graysom School

Graysom School was a one-teacher building constructed very early in the program, about 1913. The site of this school has not been located.



Horton School

Horton School received approval and was built after 1913, mainly through the efforts of Yancy Horton, Adolphus Love, Walter Jacobs, Moses Love, Everett T. Horton and Paris Bransford.

Horton School—The facade of the two-room school shows the smaller windows that illuminated the cloak room and the larger windows of the classrooms flanking the more formal entrance. Courtesy Dr. Elnora Lanier.

The school was built at Pond Beat, on what is now Buxton Road on Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville. All the area farmers were bought out in 1941—when the U.S. Army purchased the property to found the Arsenal—and the schools were closed.

Elnora Clay Lanier attended Horton School as a child, where she was taught first by Juliabelle Gunn Toney, and later by Henry Torrence. Lanier recalls walking the three miles to school with the rest of the Clay children, carrying their sack lunches.

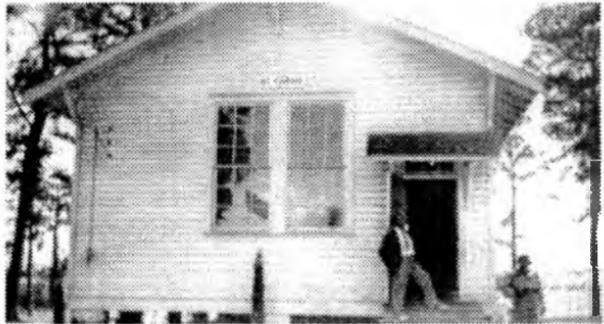
The day traditionally began with the Pledge of Allegiance, a devotion and a song. Pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln adorned the front wall. The children sat at shared desks, studying their pre-primers, primers and eventually their hard-back readers. Everyone—girls included—played stickball at recess. Lanier recalls that conscientious teachers spent recess and lunchtime helping the slower readers.

Teachers and children worked together to keep the classrooms clean and the potbelly stove going when needed. The older students took turns drawing water from the nearby well.

All together, Lanier says, dedicated teachers, involved parents and eager children worked hard to make the Horton School—the community’s opportunity for better education—a success (“Legacy...”).

Mt. Carmel School

Mt. Carmel School was built around 1913 for two teachers. A third room was added in the 1930-31 budget year, raising total cost to \$2,725. This money was donated by the black community and matched with public and Rosenwald funds. The school was located between Ryland and Winchester Roads on what is now Clearview Road in Madison



Mt. Carmel Elementary School—North or south end of building with entrance and cloak room windows. Two teachers pictured suggests this is a two-room building. Note electric wires. 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.

County. Later, it became part of the consolidation of many small rural schools at Brownsboro. Today, it serves as the Antioch Primitive Baptist Church, pastored by Rev. Walter Peavy.



Mt. Carmel—East or west side showing landscaping and classroom windows open for ventilation. 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.

Clara Friend Lacy and her siblings

daily walked the four or five miles to Mt. Carmel. Their father insisted they never miss school, even during harvest season each fall—when, Lacy recalls, a nurse would travel out to the school from the county office to dole out shots. Jimmie Jordan, a kind and loving woman, was her first teacher; the upper grades were handled by devoted educator Charles Manning.

At the start of the day, she says, the children lined up by grades with their books and sack lunches to enter the building. At recess, the girls played under the many pine trees, making playhouses with furniture and decorating the rooms with nearby wildflowers.

The girls wore cotton stockings and dresses made from feed sacks; the boys wore bib overalls. The atmosphere at school was warm and caring, Lacy remembers; the children worked hard and helped one another get their work done.

Mt. Lebanon School

In 1924, Mt. Lebanon School had just two acres and one teacher. A second room was added in 1926-27, raising its total cost to \$3,050. The school was located on Mt. Lebanon Road, northwest of Meridianville.

A second black Mt. Lebanon School is noted on a 1927 Madison County map, situated outside the then-city limits near what is now Four

Mile Post Road and Whitesburg Drive. Though it was not part of the Rosenwald program, this school survived into the 1950s.

Evie Wade Stewart attended Mt. Lebanon School, walking the half-mile or so to class with her 15 brothers and sisters.

She remembers a number of educators: teachers Johnnie Anderson, Louella Mosley, Ada Nance and Pearly Eddy; principals Mr. Sledge, Mr. Ewing and Betty E. Derrick—for whom the Mt. Lebanon community center is named. Stewart knew these people as good and loving teachers. She went on to spend her adult life in the community—later serving as a substitute teacher there.



Mt. Lebanon School—One-room building with painted exterior and side entrance. Note Craftsman details such as brackets and exposed beams under wide overhangs. 1923. Courtesy Fisk University.

The children carried whatever was left over from breakfast to school for lunch. The girls wore cumbersome, itchy, cotton stockings with high-laced shoes.

Coats and hats were hung on a special hook in the cloakroom—boys on one side, girls on the other. One teacher taught all the grades—boys on one side, girls on the other.

The day began with a devotion and the salute to the flag. At recess everyone played group games like “Poppin’ the Whip” or ring games like “Little Sally Walker.” There was no radio or television; church and school were the centers of community activity, and according to Stewart, the neighborhood would have reached out and helped if any child had been without shoes.

The pleasures of childhood, beyond the family, were the joys of sharing and growing together at school (Stewart interview).

Silver Hill School

Silver Hill was an early one-room school, built about 1913 and located at Mullins Flat, on what is now Redstone Arsenal. One teacher taught grades 1-4; a second handled grades 5-8. Teachers included Annie Hammond, L. C. Jamar, Sr., Ruby Briggs and Mattie Donegan. Silver Hill School was closed in the 1940s, when the military's purchase of much of Madison County forced farming families to relocate.

Emma Jane Langford Horton remembers Silver Hill; she and her brothers

attended school there, and those were happy days.

Emma was eager to learn and felt ready to handle all the subjects presented. She was disappointed not to be able to continue to the next level, but



Silver Hill School—Note the slight variation of the Smith plans: hip gable of roof and combination porch and cloak room entry wing to right. Courtesy Dr. Elnora Lanier.

that required leaving home and boarding with relatives in Huntsville to attend the only black high school in the entire county.

Her parents and teachers must have done a good job. As her seven children grew up and moved away from home, Horton earned her G.E.D. and attended Calhoun and Alabama A&M.

Delores Horton Slaughter also attended Silver Hill School for first and second grades. She remembers her teacher, Mrs. Rice, “was beautiful with the children.” Her teaching made all the children feel special and loved, Slaughter recalls.

Hodie Lanier McGraw attended Silver Hill for half a year while she lived with her grandparents; Anna Hammond, her teacher, was particularly kind and patient. McGraw remembers that the young children watched in admiration as older students competed in the spelling bee. They also enjoyed plays on the little stage at the front of the room.

When she transferred to the Councill School to continue her education, she found it crowded, lacking the individual attention offered at Silver Hill. Undaunted, McGraw went on to complete her degree at Alabama A&M.

Toney School

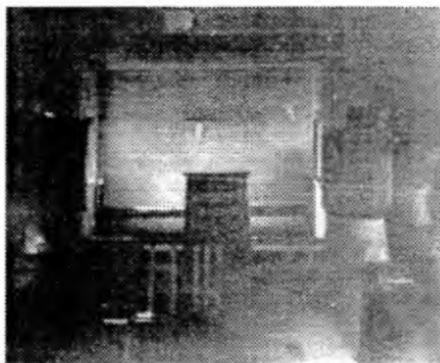
Toney School received approval to build in 1914, but action was not taken immediately; in fact, no proper school building existed there through the early 1920s. Classes were held in the church and lodge buildings for two summer months and for seven weeks of a winter session offered in 1922-1923.

In spring of 1924, parents in the community, led by Calvin Tibbs, raised \$225 to purchase two acres of land from Mr. and Mrs. Tee Carter. The Rosenwald building was erected for two teachers who served grades 1-8 (*History 2*; Turner, W.C. interview).

Eva Burns and Miss Wing were the original teachers, managing at least 60 children every class session. Only those children whose parents could afford such a luxury could sit at real school



*Toney Methodist Church School—
Grades 3-4 were housed here in 1951.
Courtesy H/MCPL.*



*Toney Methodist Church School—
Interior showing pulpit and stage used
by teachers and ministers. Poor lighting
and pews made schooling difficult.
Courtesy H/MCPL.*

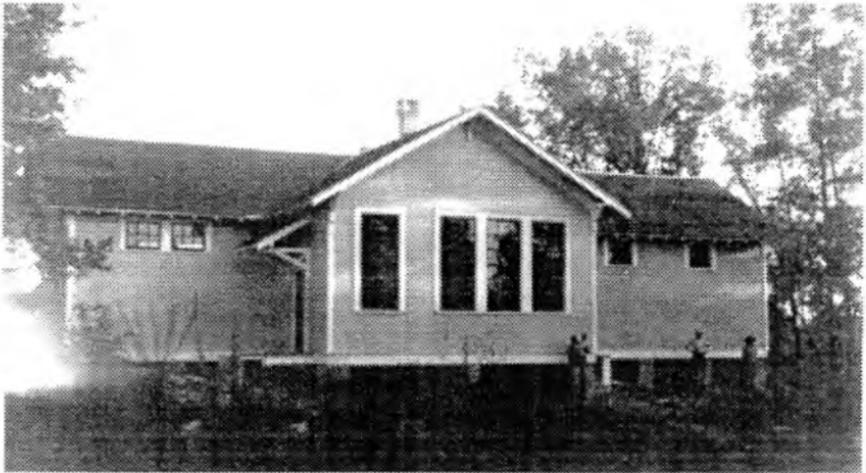
desks, which cost five dollars apiece. Most children sat on hard wooden benches.

By the 1950s, Toney Rosenwald became overcrowded again, and the children were spread out, with the upper grades going to the neighboring church buildings—Turner, Steadfast, Mt. Zion, the Primitive Baptist and New Zion (see photos, page 34).

The Toney School was the last remaining Rosenwald building in Madison County; it was torn down in August 2000.

J. B. Turner, now 85, and his younger sister Mamie Turner Tibbs, recall their days at the Toney Rosenwald School as happy and full. Tibbs says that when the new building opened, the children “thought they had gone to heaven” in that wonderful new schoolhouse.

For the Turner children, the walk to school was about two miles each way. Of course, they always took shortcuts through the woods. They recall the cloakroom—and that not every youngster had a coat to hang up. Lunch was taken to school in the familiar lard bucket. Some children’s pails were empty, but other children always shared their cold sausage or bacon biscuits and dried apples with those who had none.



Toney School—Front of building shows smaller cloak room windows on wings and separate entries for each classroom which share a vestibule. In this 1924 photograph, parents—one holding a child—pause from helping to build the school. Courtesy Fisk University.

Turner and his sister remember playing familiar games at recess: Red Rover, tag or jump rope. Later, basketball became a challenging sport for both boys and girls. Sometimes the girls outscored the boys—even while hampered by their dresses.

Not everyone behaved well enough to make it out to recess, however. Teachers at Toney did not threaten the students with switches; they had a sturdy wooden paddle. And the children knew they were likely to be spanked again at home if word got out about a bad day at school.

Turner and Tibbs agree that they are fortunate to have enjoyed the special setting that came at such a great cost of effort and money for the



Toney Baptist Church School—Grade I met here in 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.



Toney Baptist Church School—Interior showing dangerous exposed stove flue and lack of lighting and desks. 1951. Courtesy H/MCPL.

community. Tibbs still has the school bell—perhaps the only thing left from Toney Rosenwald School, except fond memories.

Gertrude Langford Simmons, a former principal at Berkley, taught at Toney in the transition years during the 1950s. The faculty was well educated and professional, but the buildings, she recalls, were primitive and inadequate. For instance, what students, sitting in pews of a church, writing on their laps, could take good notes or properly hold a book?

Though she saw the lack of material equipment as a setback, Simmons believed the vision and determination of the teachers and parents created an extended family and network of support.

“We’re poor, but we ain’t pitiful,” Simmons says, echoing a value taught to her in her own childhood. The benign poverty of the South was less harmful than the ghettos of the North, she maintains, and that fact, combined with community support, ensured that children who attended the Toney School obtained a positive self-image, allowing them to enter the adult world as good citizens.

The school served as a center for community activity, sponsoring a Boy Scout troop led by Willie E. Burwell and other fathers. The girls and their mothers were encouraged to participate in home demonstration club activities. The school song expected the students “to compete with the best in the land,” and this spirit allowed their athletes to participate

energetically in the North Alabama Athletic Association.

The town’s sense of unity and loyalty has remained



strong since *Toney School—Rear view showing window bays, exit and brick chimney. Photo circa 1924.*

those years, says former Toney School attendee W.C. Turner. Today, a neighborhood park, “Four Flags over Toney,” is dedicated to the school. The school’s legacy of discipline, love, loyalty and hard work has continued to serve as a guiding force for the community.

The community at Normal—though never directly associated with the Rosenwald schools—offered education courses taught by a trained faculty at Alabama A&M. Some fortunate students continued on to the next level at the Laboratory School, the only high school available to black students in Madison County for many years. Though Alex Haley, bestselling author of *Roots* and *Queen*, was perhaps the most noteworthy student to attend, the solid educational foundation gave rise to innumerable professional adults, many of whom remained to serve Madison County well (Turner, Dorothy interview).

Afterword: The Remains of a Dream

Those who attended the Rosenwald schools agree: only the oldest generations now remember the wonder of those days. The promise of those humble buildings.

As the Rosenwald Fund was concluding its mission, in the years following its founder's death, only one exception to the discontinued building program was made. President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested one last Rosenwald School be built in 1937 at Warm Springs, GA. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt served as a trustee of the Fund from 1940 until its termination in 1948 (Mansell 37-8).

Throughout the South, many of the schools operated until well after World War II. But even as the counties began taking responsibility for upkeep, many of the buildings were being less and less well maintained. Overflow students once again were housed in local churches and lodges, and remember spending their formative years not at desks in a Rosenwald schoolhouse, but in St. Peter's Church or the Veterans' Building in Madison, or Saint Ruth's at Madison Crossroads.

A few buildings scattered about the countryside—none now in Madison County—are all that remain of a dream for education that once struggled its way into reality at the hands of a Jewish merchant, a former slave educator and a Quaker spinster.

One by one, the buildings pass from the scene, torn down to make room for a world where schoolrooms are less precious, more easily taken for granted. Only those surviving former students remember. And they too are fewer in number as the years shutter past... Echoing footfalls in a darkened coatroom.

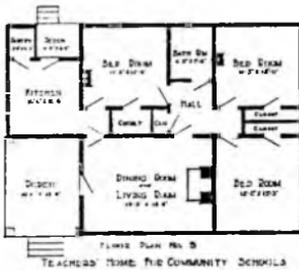
Soon, all that will be left are the words that have been written about Julius Rosenwald, Booker T. Washington and Anna Jeanes, and a few faded photographs of buildings that once embodied their shared dreams for proper and equal education. Dreams they helped bring to fruition for countless African-American children. Dreams countless African-American families brought to fruition for themselves.

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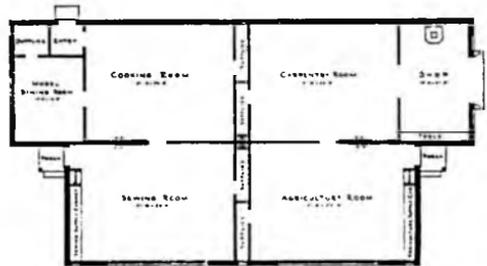
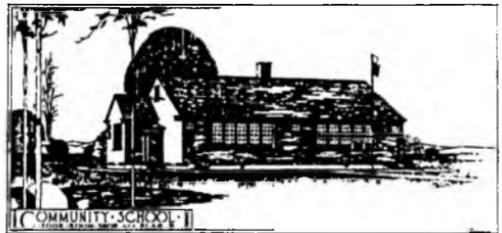
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Smith's booklet, *Community School Plans*, included plans for the larger and more ambitious communities. Much like a catalog (perhaps a Sears catalog), the community could choose the plan that best fit their needs and send for the detailed plans, contractor's notes, and supply inventory.



The ideal Rosenwald Community School would include a Teacherage to provide housing for teachers and a Four-Room Shop for vocational training for the students. The shop maintained the simple Craftsman style and fenestration plan of the school building, while the teachers' home included Colonial Revival details such as columns near the porch, sidelights for the front door and dormer windows.



Special Acknowledgements

The following is a list of those individuals who shared their memories, their impressions and their educational archives of schools built with the help of the Rosenwald Fund. Some of these individuals have already been cited as sources for specific information throughout the articles; this does not diminish the importance and influence of the stories of others. We thank all of you for educating us and sharing your thoughts and lives.

Valiene Crutcher Battle
Trina Binkley
Darrah Bones
Mary Chambers
Olye Conley
Minneola Dixon
Diane Ellis
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T. David Freeman
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Bob Hayden
Bobbie Hyder
Emma Jane Langford Horton
Beth Howse
Lloyd Humphrey
Dr. James Johnson,
Clara Friend Lacy
Dr. Elnora Clay Lanier
Jeff Mansell
Dr. Bill McAlister
Hodie Lanier McGraw
Don Popejoy

William Sibley
Gertrude Langford Simmons
Evie Wade Stewart
Geraldine Clay Tibbs
Mamie T. Tibbs
Dorothy Turner
J. B. Turner
W. C. Turner
Delores Horton Slaughter
Mildred Stegers
Dorothy Taylor Walker
Joyce Williams
Mattie Wood

Archives of:
Alabama A&M
Black State Archives
Fisk University
Madison County Schools
Oakwood College
Rev. Davis,
Turner Christian M.E. Church
Rev. Walter Peavy,
Antioch P.B. Church

HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 786
Huntsville, AL 35804

The mission of the HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION is the preservation of historically or architecturally significant sites and structures in Huntsville and Madison County. The Foundation also works to increase public awareness of the value of these sites and structures.

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation, a scholarly journal, and *Foundation Forum*, a quarterly newsletter, are published by the Foundation. The Foundation owns and operates Harrison Brothers Hardware and has partially renovated the Harvie P. Jones Building next door. Tenants occupy the finished space—Bird and Kamback Architects and The Huntsville Inn, a tea room. A warehouse of architectural artifacts and materials for reuse in historic preservation projects within Madison County also is operated by the Foundation.

The Foundation is actively involved in efforts to establish a formal revitalization of downtown Huntsville and sponsors functions to draw attention to businesses that locate in historic properties. In association with the Von Braun Lions Club, the Foundation co-sponsors “Trade Day on The Square” each September. Other events include public briefings, covered-dish suppers, and an annual awards dinner honoring notable contributors to historic preservation.

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