

than churches. In turn the schools would have simple wood siding and were painted white, gray, cream, or stained nut-brown. The walls of two-room schools could be moved to create more room. The windows were double-hung and a bank of windows was often placed on the east side to take advantage of the natural light. Even the colors of the exterior wood, the interior walls and ceiling, and the shades on the windows were often light colored to avoid absorbing excess heat and to reflect light around the room. Students' desks were arranged with the most windows to the left. This would prevent a shadow when writing – something still done today despite artificial lighting.

When Rosenwald met Booker T. Washington, he approved of the self-help attitude and ambition of the African American community in Alabama. Together they began a system of grant matching to provide rural communities with funds for education if they were willing to take on the communal responsibility and become an integral part of the system. In order to qualify, at least two acres of land was deeded for the school and all funds for construction would need to be gathered beforehand.

Often the land was donated by an African American landowner. Other members of the community pulled together funds for the construction. The African American community always contributed the most and the more money they raised for themselves, the more money was allotted from the public funds and from the Rosenwald Fund. Starting in 1916, Alabama legislation offered the allowance of public monies toward African American schools up to half the amount raised by the local community. In Madison County, of the nine schools, only two had contributions from the white community. Overall, the Rosenwald School Building Fund was intended to be seen as more than “a series of schoolhouses, but as a community enterprise in cooperation between citizens and officials, white and colored.” Unfortunately, this wasn't always the case and in general, the white community only contributed about 4% to the fund.

The concept of a community that helps to pull itself up by the bootstraps was not new to the African American communities of Alabama or the South in general. A half century earlier, when the Freedmen's Bureau



(Above) Julius Rosenwald While Trustee at the University of Chicago, No Date (University of Chicago Photographic Archives, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

provided assistance to newly freed slaves, the freedmen's response was to double their own efforts in tandem. For decades, African American communities had taken advantage of every opportunity to better themselves. When it came to education this meant donating materials, labor, or land to make schoolhouses. Long before Rosenwald and Smith designed schools and dictated supplies, a community of freedmen in Huntsville in 1866 raised the funds and materials for a school and inquired of the Bureau about construction plans and procuring a teacher.

In 1913, six communities in Alabama were able to meet the criteria and Rosenwald promised \$300 to each one-room school. Soon, at least a hundred more communities qualified for assistance and the Rosenwald School Building Fund was incorporated in 1917. Once Rosenwald became president of Sears, Roebuck & Company, he was able to expand the School Fund to \$20 million with a gift of the company's stock in 1927. This large gift had the condition attached that all funds were to be spent within 25 years of his death – which happened in 1932--to maintain his philosophy of philanthropy and education. Rosenwald

(Below) Julius Rosenwald (Left) and Booker T. Washington (Right), 1915 (University of Chicago Photographic Archives, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

