EDUCATING GENERATIONS:
THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF THE ALLEN-WHITE SCHOOL CAMPUS,
A ROSENWALD SCHOOL IN WHITEVILLE, TENNESSEE

By

Brannon Marie Smithwick

A Thesis Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE USC SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION

May 2023

Copyright 2023 Brannon Marie Smithwick
Dedication

This project is dedicated to the Black community in Hardeman County, Tennessee, who have been passionately working to reimagine the Allen-White School as they once knew it for the past fifty years. May their efforts, and the efforts of all Rosenwald school communities in the American South, prove successful in years to come for the benefit of our country’s history and healing.
I am grateful beyond words to the members of my committee: Trudi Sandmeier, Dr. Meredith Drake Reitan, and Jay Platt. Their guidance molded my words, and their input helped shape the pages of this thesis into what it is today. I am especially thankful to you, Trudi, for your ongoing support and weekly advice as I continued down the path of this project. To my fellow MHC cohort thesis warriors, I salute you. Especially Emily Varley and Emi Takahara, who have eased my thesis anxieties on more than one occasion this past year. To my mom, Ann Smithwick, for bringing the Rosenwald schools and the story of the Allen-White School to my attention in the first place. I could never have done this without your ongoing support and consultation. To Dr. Mary Hoffschwelle, your guidance helped me better understand the Rosenwald Fund’s rural school building program and the importance of the Rosenwald schools’ legacy in the South. Your direction helped me contextualize this work, and I am so thankful to you for that. To Mr. Evelyn Robertson of Whiteville, your collaboration on this project has been invaluable to me. Your aid and encouragement enlightened my spirit and informed my efforts to recount the meaningful history of the Allen-White School more than you could know. To the former Allen-White students I had the opportunity to interview, thank you for lending your stories to make this project as informative as it possibly can be. To my dad, Robin, and my sister, Blair, thank you for your endless words of encouragement. And lastly, to Eric, my partner, thank you for your love and support, especially when I felt stuck and needed a boost. You helped talk me through much of the content of this thesis, and I could not have done it without you.
# Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................... iii

List of Figures .................................................................................................................. vii

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ix

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1
  Identity Terminology ........................................................................................................ 2
  Date Terminology ............................................................................................................ 5
  Professional Terminology ............................................................................................... 6
  Research Methodology ................................................................................................... 7

**Chapter 1. Early Public Education for Southern Black Americans** ................................ 8
  Black Education in the South through the Civil War ......................................................... 8
  Tennessee’s Education Legislation through Reconstruction ............................................. 17
  Philanthropic Investment in Black Education ................................................................. 25
    The Peabody Fund ........................................................................................................ 27
    The Slater Fund ............................................................................................................ 27
    The Jeanes Fund .......................................................................................................... 28
    The General Education Board ..................................................................................... 29

**Chapter 2. The Rosenwald Fund and its Rural Schools Program** ................................ 32
  The Founding Partners of the Rural School Building Program ........................................ 32
  Julius Rosenwald and the Philanthropic Mindset ........................................................... 32
  Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Philosophy ..................................................... 33
  The Early Years at Tuskegee: Establishing the Rural Schools Program and its Architecture . 36
    The Macon County Project and Early Experimentation, 1905-1910 ............................ 36
    Formulating a Partnership and Initial Investment in Rural Schools, 1911-1912 ............ 36
    Washington’s Proposal and the Rural School Experiment, 1912-1914 ......................... 39
    Growing the Program Beyond Alabama, 1914-1915 ................................................... 43
    The Design of the Rosenwald Schools ......................................................................... 47
    Washington’s Death, Reorganization, and Establishing the Rosenwald Fund, 1915-1920. 51
  The Later Years in Nashville: Tennessee Relocation and Reorganization of the Fund ...... 55
    Rethinking the Rural School Building Program, 1920-1932 .................................... 55
  Rosenwald Fund Accomplishments in Tennessee .......................................................... 63

**Chapter 3. From a Building to a Plant: The Story of the Allen-White School Campus** ..... 67
  The Hardeman County Context ..................................................................................... 67
  The Rural Landscape of Whiteville, Hardeman County .................................................. 67
  Early Education and Public School Law, 1823-1900 ...................................................... 69
  Establishing Black Public Education in Whiteville ......................................................... 73
  Jesse C. Allen and The School for Colored Children, 1905-1917 .................................... 73
  A New Campus Vision and the Push for an Industrial School, 1917-1920 ....................... 74
The Hardeman County Training School Years: Building a Rosenwald School .......................... 77
  Dorris Hall, the First Brick Rosenwald School in Tennessee, 1920 .................................. 77
  Early Principals and Fundraising Problems, 1920-1928 .................................................. 86
  James H. White and a New Approach, 1928-1930 .............................................................. 89
The Allen-White School Years: Growing an Industrial School Plant .............................. 96
  Renaming the School, The NYA Program, and Campus Expansion, 1930-1948 .......... 96
  Fields and Landscaping .............................................................................................................. 101
  Playgrounds and Parking Lot .................................................................................................... 103
  Ingram Hall, 1930 ..................................................................................................................... 105
  Howse Hall, 1930 ....................................................................................................................... 108
  Principal’s Home, 1932 .............................................................................................................. 110
  Clift Recreational Hall, 1934 ................................................................................................. 111
  Sandwich Shop, 1934 ............................................................................................................... 113
  W.Y. Allen Hall, 1934 ............................................................................................................... 114
  NYA Dormitory, 1936 .............................................................................................................. 114
  The First Cheek Hall, 1940 ...................................................................................................... 115
  Agnes Tierney Hall, Gilbert Hall, and the New Cheek Hall, 1947-1948 ..................... 119
  New Leadership and a Modern Curriculum in the Civil Rights Era, 1948-1969 .... 125
  Elementary School, 1964 ......................................................................................................... 127
Integration, Arson, and the End of Allen-White, 1970-1974 .............................................. 128

  Early Efforts to Conserve the Allen-White Campus ............................................................... 132
    Building Uses after School Closure ....................................................................................... 132
    Protecting a Community Asset with Grassroots Planning Efforts .................................. 135
    Another Arson and a New Era ............................................................................................... 138
Possible Treatment Options for the Tangible Built Environment ........................................ 140
  The Four Treatments and their Intended Applications .............................................................. 140
    Option One: Reconstructing Dorris Hall ............................................................................ 142
    Understanding Sites of Conflict and Conscience ............................................................... 147
    Option Two: Preserving a Ruin .............................................................................................. 150
    Option Three: Rehabilitating a Campus ............................................................................. 153
    Option Four: A Combined Treatment Approach .............................................................. 156
  The Problem with Integrity .................................................................................................... 158
Alternative Approaches to Protect Intangible Heritage ......................................................... 162
  The Production of Space and an Expanded Heritage Discourse ........................................ 162
  Qualitative Methods for Heritage Conservation ................................................................. 166
  Digital Methods for Heritage Conservation ........................................................................... 185

Conclusion and Recommendations ......................................................................................... 194

Bibliography .............................................................................................................................. 200
Appendices........................................................................................................................................216
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School .............................................................................216
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes ‘48 ...... 223
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students ..........................................................229
Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs ..... 235
Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus ....................................................256
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus .....................................................262
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Teacher and students at a Freedmen’s Bureau school..........................................................14
Figure 1.2 Black men and women, probably Jeanes teachers.................................................................29
Figure 2.1 Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington.........................................................................46
Figure 2.2 Early Rosenwald school plan for a one teacher school.........................................................50
Figure 2.3 Community School Plan 3.......................................................................................................60
Figure 2.4 Map of Rosenwald schools, 1932.............................................................................................63
Figure 2.5 Julius Rosenwald with students from a Rosenwald school.....................................................66
Figure 3.1 Rosenwald Fund 6-A Plan for a “Six Teacher Community School”........................................79
Figure 3.2 Hardeman County Training School footprint.........................................................................82
Figure 3.3 Cornerstone lists founding trustees of the HCTS.....................................................................83
Figure 3.4 Photograph Dorris Hall building, ca. March 1921.................................................................84
Figure 3.5 Photograph Dorris Hall building, ca. March 1920.................................................................84
Figure 3.6 HCTS mortgage burning ceremony.........................................................................................92
Figure 3.7 Playground equipment and skating rink in front of Dorris Hall..............................................103
Figure 3.8 One of the first campuses busses in front of Ingram Hall, ca. 1930s.................................105
Figure 3.9 Proposed design for Ingram Hall............................................................................................107
Figure 3.10 Front and side view, Ingram Hall, Whiteville, TN, Hardeman County.................................107
Figure 3.11 Proposed design for Howse Hall..............................................................................................108
Figure 3.12 Vocational Building, Howse Hall............................................................................................109
Figure 3.13 Principal’s Home....................................................................................................................111
Figure 3.14 Clift Recreational Hall...........................................................................................................112
Figure 3.15 Photos of campus buildings...................................................................................................114
Figure 3.16 Cheek Hall under construction, 1939, view north.................................................................117
Figure 3.17 Cheek Hall under construction, 1939, view northwest......................................................117
Figure 3.18 Cheek Hall under construction, architectural perspective....................................................121
Figure 3.19 Completed Cheek Hall reconstructed design.......................................................................125
Figure 3.20 New elementary school building.............................................................................................128
Figure 3.21 Site plan of the Allen-White School, ca. 1930-1950.............................................................131
Figure 4.1 Site plan of the Allen-White School, ca. 2022........................................................................133
Figure 4.2  Extant 1964 elementary school building.................................................................135
Figure 4.3  Dorris Hall as it stood ca. 2006..............................................................................137
Figure 4.4  Dorris Hall today, after damage caused by the 2012 arson.....................................139
Figure 4.5  Proposed Allen-White Center for Education and Cultural Advancement..........143
Figure 4.6  Portrait of Jesse Norment ‘46..................................................................................169
Figure 4.7  Portrait of sisters Ruby ’45 and Mabel ’40 Andrews ‘46.........................................169
Figure 4.8  Plan of Dorris Hall by Christine Rhodes.................................................................179
Figure 4.9  Portrait of Fredell Harris ’66 with his Allen-White warmups..............................180
Figure 4.10 Video interview still of Fredell Harris ’66 with his chart.......................................181
Figure 4.11 Mental map drawn by Fredell Harris ’66 in 2022.................................................183
Figure 4.12 Exported shot of James Madison’s Montpelier 3D Model......................................187
Figure 4.13 Image of LiDAR generated point could of New Hope School.............................190
Figure C.1  Group portrait of former Allen-White students......................................................199
Abstract

Access to education in the United States is often taken for granted today. But this was not the case in the years dominated by Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era segregation laws in the American South. At a time when racially restrictive policies were written into the social contract, Black southerners, especially those living in rural areas, relied on grassroots organizing and philanthropic contributions to build schools that would create opportunities for students. These efforts became a springboard for Black economic mobility in the centuries following the end of institutional slavery. This thesis examines the history of public education legislation in Tennessee, location of the headquarters of the Rosenwald Fund, perhaps the most influential philanthropic organization that contributed to the construction of rural Black schools at the time. In particular, it analyzes the history of the Allen-White School, an accomplished Rosenwald school in Whiteville, Hardeman County that served as the center of the surrounding Black community from its inception in 1920 to its closure in 1970 when the local school system integrated. It chronicles the attempts of the Hardeman County community to reconstruct the school, even as they faced financial setbacks and arson attacks, arguing that the current heritage discourse must advance beyond parochial conservation efforts centered on the tangible built environment. Instead, more emphasis should be placed on research methodologies that bring to light intangible collective memory as an appropriate criterion for place-based heritage action. Placing Black narratives at the forefront of heritage conservation practices in the American South will only ever is critical to ensure the inclusion of histories and perspectives that have for too long been excluded or forgotten.
Introduction

The barriers faced by Black Americans in the South have been written about by academics, journalists, and advocates alike. Ample scholarship exists about Black education and economic achievement compared to that of White communities, a topic that has been researched exhaustively in fields categorized within the social sciences.¹ But what has not been thoroughly studied is the complicated yet symbiotic relationship between rural communities, philanthropic organizations, and local governments in the South when it comes to the establishment of public schools for Black students in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, there is a lack of publicized first-hand accounts of the relationship between these schools and their pupils, teachers, parents, and other community members that explore themes of collective memory and cultural significance in the broader context of Black education.

Observing these underappreciated narratives through the lens of heritage conservation brings to light stories of grassroots organizing, community fundraising, and the perseverance necessary to overcome prejudice that produced the schools and the buildings that housed them, transforming the lives of the area’s young people. This thesis seeks to further an understanding of the resiliency and success of rural Black communities of the South, such as the one in Hardeman County, Tennessee, in establishing institutions of education during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Eras. These stories not only represent the original quest for economic mobility in the twentieth century, but remain essential tools for overcoming the conservation obstacles faced by these communities today.

Chapter 1 establishes the framework for the remainder of the project by providing a brief history of Black education in the region, and more specifically in the State of Tennessee, from the years leading up to the Civil War until the turn of the twentieth century. It discusses the region’s education policies and legislation that established the public school system, and summarizes the philanthropic benefactors that propelled the rural schools movement for Black education in the first decades of the century. Although several philanthropies are introduced, the

Rosenwald Fund is further elaborated upon in Chapter 2, given its considerable involvement with the cause of rural school construction. The chapter discusses the necessary political relationships and architectural standards set by the Fund that defined Rosenwald schools in Tennessee and throughout the region. In Chapter 3, the scope of the project narrows to focus on Hardeman County where the Allen-White School, which was established with Rosenwald funding in the Town of Whiteville, played a significant role in advancing Black education for rural students in the southwest region of Tennessee. By analyzing the school’s history and culture and chronology of building construction between 1905-1974, it becomes evident that rural Black communities were responsible for their own success in establishing facilities for education. These are important heritage stories and practices rooted in vernacular forms that have been suppressed and cast off in favor of mainstream monumental architecture conservation.

Chapter 4 recounts the struggle to conserve the Allen-White School by discussing the heritage conservation efforts enacted by its community after the school officially closed in 1974. Amid planning and financial struggles, the Allen-White campus suffered multiple arson attacks that transformed these efforts from a rehabilitation project to one of reconstruction. The analysis in this chapter contextualizes the difficult work of vernacular conservation within the greater themes of inequity and racism, and introduces the question: ‘how do we conserve heritage when a site has already been destroyed?’ This question is explored by defining and discussing heritage conservation and its current limitations with regard to subjects like significance, authenticity, and integrity, and offering various approaches to conserving Allen-White’s tangible built environment based on the Secretary of Interior’s four treatment standards. The literature attempting to push the field in a direction more inclusive of intangible cultural heritage is discussed, and then alternative research methodologies such as qualitative materials and digital methodologies, which are currently undervalued in the field, are considered. The chapter concludes with the argument that in order to illuminate the stories of underrepresented places that remain at risk of being forgotten, heritage professionals and institutions must adopt methodologies that expand analyses beyond arguments of tangible significance.

Identity Terminology

In an effort to understand the complicated history of Black education in Hardeman County and the American South at large, it is critical to establish language that accurately
represents the community to which these stories belong. American identity is complex and intersecting, shaped by the nation’s patterns of colonialism and slavery in pursuit of political and economic power.\textsuperscript{2} Despite some advancement, many of these patterns persist today, and the stories told in this thesis affect people of every racialized group, class, and gender differently.\textsuperscript{3} Moreover, the quest for inclusive and uplifting racial terminology is ongoing and evolving. Racial and ethnic terms are best defined by those who embody them and as a White, cis-gendered, heterosexual woman, it is not my place to do so for a community to which I do not belong. Therefore, I feel it is necessary to clarify the language choices I have made in this thesis to recount stories of inequity, segregation, perseverance, and success as accurately as possible.

To recognize race as a societal construct, throughout the project I use the phrase “racialized group” or “racialized people” rather than “race” or “ethnicity,” unless quoted. As author Natalia Molina writes, “[these terms] although useful, tend to reify the categories they describe rather than underscore their constructedness.”\textsuperscript{4} Furthermore, the terms “enslaved persons” or “enslaved people” are used in lieu of the term “slave” because they better emphasize the humanity of an individual forced to perform labor against their will.\textsuperscript{5}

Most of the people referenced in this project are of African descent given their geographic location and the American South’s involvement with the transcontinental slave trade from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{6} However, as with other southern states during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras, Tennessee experienced migratory shifts among Black professionals who travelled from the North to the South in search of job

\textsuperscript{3} Although gender dynamics specifically pertaining to school curriculum and community are explored in this project, the gender roles within Black communities in the American South during the timeframe studied were categorized by traditional cis-gendered expectations of males and females. For that reason, gendered terms such as girls/women and boys/men are used. However, I recognize that gender is a complex subject and various expressions of gender and sexuality likely existed within the communities studied.
\textsuperscript{4} Natalia Molina, \textit{A Place at the Nayarit: How a Mexican Restaurant Nourished a Community}, 1\textsuperscript{st} ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022): 8.
opportunities after the Civil War. This pattern developed primarily with professors, teachers, and administrative leaders who relocated to southern states in search of job opportunities once slavery had been permanently abolished. Although the term “African American” may accurately represents the majority of subjects in this thesis, it is because of these migratory shifts that I have instead chosen to use the term Black. I believe this is the best way to ensure inclusivity of all potential transnational ancestries represented within the writing. The adjective Black, unless quoted as originally written otherwise, is always capitalized to afford the Black community the respect and dignity deserved as equivalent to other nationalities, racialized groups, and cultures.

According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, “the detachment of ‘White’ as a proper noun allows White people to sit out of conversations about race and removes accountability from White people’s and White institutions’ involvement in racism.” Therefore, in reference to the racialized group, the term White is capitalized as well, so as not to inherently affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm for all Americans. Although not a replacement for remaking the construct of racialized groups through behavior rather than words, I hope this choice will help highlight the existence of the prejudiced power imbalance that still exists today.

Many of the sources in this project were written during the first half of the twentieth century and are therefore reminiscent of their time in the verbiage. The words “Negro” and “colored” have been carefully avoided as descriptive terms and are only used when necessary, such as written in quotations or job titles and program names that are significant to the context of this thesis. The phrase “of color” is used sparingly and only when referring to the intersection

---

7 This phenomenon of Black professionals moving South is not to be confused with the Great Migration, which spanned from ca. 1910-1970 during which many Black southerners, most of which were former sharecroppers, moved North and West in search of urban economic opportunities and better living conditions. The writing of Isabel Wilkerson chronicles this topic through interviews and first-hand accounts. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Random House, 2010).


of non-White communities. The phrases “Black Americans” and “Black Southerners” are often used interchangeably throughout the project given the regional scope. In the first chapter, these phrases are inclusive of both free and enslaved Black people of the South so as not to delineate either group as being un-American based on circumstances beyond their control. Lastly, to avoid classism and further marginalization based on economic status, I use the term “lesser income” instead of “poor” or “low-income” throughout the project.

Date Terminology

In this project, I have capitalized the letter “P” for Progressive when referring to philanthropists and other education reformers of the era. The Progressive Era was a period of social activism and political reform spanning from the late 1890s to the late 1910s. Progressivism, as it was known, was a response to poor working and living conditions in urban areas of the North that resulted from industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and political corruption in the nineteenth century. Progressives, typically wealthy capitalist elites, pushed policies that advocated for better health and economic conditions, women’s suffrage, and access to education, among other concerns. However, despite their desire to reform and improve quality of life for Americans, most White Progressivists’ failed to challenge the inequities of segregation and class discrimination which often disproportionately affected people of color throughout the county.12 This theme will be discussed in the thesis within the context of how Progressive education reform policies affected Black Americans living in the South at the time.

The term “Jim Crow” is inherently racist. It stems from the name of a caricaturized role played by an actor in Black face in the play The Kentucky Rifle beginning as early as the 1830s. By the late nineteenth century, the term “Jim Crow” found new life as a blanket term for segregationist laws passed by local governments after Reconstruction. Although segregationists policies and overt racism existed in both the North and the South, it was the southern region of the United States that embodied the term “Jim Crow” to define these laws that would remain until the mid-twentieth century.13 Unfortunately, no other term to define this era pertaining specifically to the history of the American South exists. As a result, I have used the term “Jim

Crow Era” to define the period of time in the South from 1865 after the end of the Civil War, until the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that ended school segregation, marking the end of the Jim Crow Era and the start of the national Civil Rights Movement.

Professional Terminology

The term “historic preservation” is informed by nineteenth century efforts in the United States to protect places regarded as historically significant. The earliest endeavors were typically focused on preserving high-style properties associated with people significant to the nation’s history and specific works by master architects, the capital for which flowed from private property owners and organizations. An attempt to vernacularize the movement was established in the mid-twentieth century through programs such as the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), and the framework for the professional field was codified in the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act.

Because of its traditional emphasis on the tangible built environment relating to upper- and middle-income Americans, many heritage professionals have determined the phrase “historic preservation” to be exclusionary of cultural practices and traditions, especially those of underrecognized communities. Therefore, in this project I use the term “historic preservation” only when referring to heritage practices pertaining solely to architecture. Otherwise, I have chosen to use the broader term “heritage conservation” when referring to community-oriented, grassroots protection efforts and social issues as it provides a more inclusive recognition of intangible cultural practices, place-based collective memory, and personal identity that each also fall under the umbrella of “heritage,” known as “intangible heritage.” The phrase also does well to emphasize the importance of documentation and managing incremental change of culturally significant places over time via the word “conservation.” This subtle yet meaningful change in

14 The above-listed treatments are further elaborated upon Chapter 4. They include preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction, and are defined as the four approaches to work at historic places by the Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, whose guidelines are found here: Anne E. Grimmer, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, & Reconstructing Historic Buildings* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, 2017).


language shifts the profession away from values-based, elite-oriented conservation practices and toward embracing the narratives of all communities, such as those traditionally marginalized from American society, whose stories are not always connected to architectural landmarks and sites, or whose sites may not be architecturally significant in the traditional western context.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Research Methodology}

This thesis is written primarily from discoveries made through books, journal articles, newspapers, and published master’s theses and dissertation papers written on the subject matter. I was also able to collect a significant number of primary sources to support the research, including correspondences, meeting minutes, policy memos, budget items, original graphics, and other ephemera from the Tennessee State Archives, Fisk University Special Collections Library, Mississippi Valley State University Special Collections Library, Bolivar Hardeman County Library local reading room, and various local contacts in Hardeman County, Tennessee.

In addition to written sources, I had the opportunity to use material published in a photography and oral history project titled \textit{Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders} which was created, published, and exhibited at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee by my mother, Ann Smithwick, between 2005-2007. In addition to the twenty-six oral history interviews collected for her project in 2005, I recorded eight additional oral history interviews with former Allen-White School students in October 2022, two of whom had previously been interviewed by my mother. Each of the eight students interviewed were asked to complete mental maps of the Allen-White campus to help me piece together the chronology and placement of the site’s historic built environment based on memory.\textsuperscript{18} Although this topic deserves further research, advocacy, and publication, I hope my attempt to include non-institutional reference material and local community input will help in conveying the story of the Allen-White School in Hardeman County as accurately as possible.

\textsuperscript{17} For more details and analysis on the language constructed around heritage conservation and its meaning, see Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{18} The concept of mental mapping was taken from Kevin Lynch, \textit{The Image of the City} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960) and is discussed further in Chapter 4.
Chapter 1. Early Public Education for Southern Black Americans

Black Education in the South through the Civil War

To say educational opportunities for Black southerners did not exist prior to the Civil War would be a disservice to the teachers who risked incarceration—and in many cases their lives—to run schools for Black children at the time. But that is not to say access to education was plentiful and well-rounded in curriculum, or even that a significant percentage of Black children received an education at all. In fact, the vast majority of Black people living in the South at the time were enslaved and therefore had no access to education at all, for fear from White oppressors that Black literacy would prove a threat to the authority and existence of the slave system. As a result, the curriculum of Black education, in the Antebellum South through the Civil War, when it existed at all, was limited primarily to teaching enslaved peoples and free Black children how to read. Still though, the practice of teaching Black students at all was incredibly rare and highly contested as it had been in the Colonial Era.

The most common reason educating enslaved persons was sometimes permitted in the South was in order to Christianize them. Several denominations, including Puritans, Baptists, Catholics, and Quakers were eager to educate enslaved people, for various reasons. Most religious groups felt it was their duty to teach enslaved persons to read so they could interpret the Bible and worship God in their individual pursuit of salvation. These groups believed that to

19 The following chapter chronicles the history of Black education in the American South and, more specifically, in Tennessee. During the period discussed here, many more opportunities were afforded in the North to both enslaved and free Black Americans that, should they be thoroughly discussed here, would provide more context than needed to understand the objective of this project.

20 It must be noted, however, that not all educators who taught Black children at this time did so with wholly good intentions. While many were abolitionists and free Black community leaders themselves, others were White teachers who supported the institution of slavery, yet felt it their obligation to teach Black students to read so they could better obey their masters and understand the Bible. Jerry Wayne Woods, “The Julius Rosenwald Fund School Building Program: A Saga in the Growth and Development of African American Education in Selected West Tennessee Communities” (Master’s thesis, University of Mississippi, 1995), 79-87.


22 Unlike other denominations that worked to Christianize enslaved persons within the societal construct of institutional slavery, it is important to mention that the most active group in converting enslaved peoples were the Quakers. Contrary to other Christian sects, the Quaker ethos opposed enslavement. Although it is not elaborated upon in this project, it is of note that Quaker ideologies and moral standards aligned with those of the abolitionists, and although their work primarily took place in the Mid-Atlantic and New England, there was a small Quaker presence in the Carolinas and Georgia that took an active role in freeing and converting enslaved persons by taking part in the Underground Railroad. Adrienne M. Israel, “Free Blacks, Quakers, and the Underground Railroad in Piedmont North Carolina,” The North Carolina Historical Review 95, no.1 (2018): 1-28. http://www.jstor.org/stable/45184905.
convert an enslaved person was to free an enslaved person, not from their physical imprisonment, but from eternal damnation of their soul.\textsuperscript{23} Margaret Douglass, a White supporter of slavery who was arrested for teaching both free Black students and enslaved how to read in Virginia wrote upon her conviction: “I deem it the duty of every Southerner, morally and religiously, to instruct his slaves, that they may know their duties to their masters, and to their common God,” and that after serving her one-month sentence, she would continue her work by “endeavoring to teach the colored race humility and a prayerful spirit, how to bear their sufferings as our Saviour bore his for all of us. I will teach them their duty to their superiors, how to live, and how to die.”\textsuperscript{24} Such was the sentiment for many devout Southern Christians during the nineteenth century who supported the institution of slavery but made it their mission as Christians to teach enslaved children and adults to be literate as a means of conversion.

Another reason enslaved peoples were sometimes offered a basic education was to aid in their duties or to establish hierarchy among enslaved populations. Some White owners encouraged teaching enslaved persons to read because they felt it increased the economic efficiency of their labor supply. Most commonly, some female house enslaved persons were taught reading, writing, and basic arithmetic so they could aid in assisting White children with their own lessons.\textsuperscript{25} Some owners also felt it necessary to teach a few male enslaved people and bondservants to be literate so they could run errands on their behalf. At Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello and Poplar Forest estates, archeological studies suggest that some artisan and house enslaved peoples were taught to read and write based on hierarchy of duties and perhaps as an award for good work. There is also evidence to suggest that enslaved persons across the South took it upon themselves to lean to read and write through the use of slates and other materials acquired in secrecy. They did so by learning privately in quarters for enslaved people and organizing schools that met before dawn or late into the night.\textsuperscript{26} However, on the whole, literacy was seen by White southerners as a threat to both the institution of slavery and their investment in it. In the years preceding the Civil War, statewide laws across the South became increasingly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Williams, \textit{Self-Taught}, 34.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Woods, “School Building Program,” 80.
\end{itemize}
forceful. Not only did legislation prohibit access to education for both the enslaved and freed populations, but it penalized anyone willing to provide it.\textsuperscript{27}

Nonetheless, schools for free Black Americans also existed in the South before the Civil War with the help of Black and White educators and community members. Established predominately in well-populated urban areas, these schools were recognized by supporters as a primary vehicle by which to resist institutional racism and second-class citizenship. Education policy historian Christopher M. Span clarifies that:

Southern free black leaders recognized the necessity and expediency of education given the group's limited and insecure existence in the American social order… Schools were intended to be institutions that informed African American youth of their precarious societal statuses; they were to assist freeborn African American children in learning the literacy skills necessary for combating discrimination, segregation, and slavery in adulthood; and they were expected to aid African Americans in acquiring equality, or at least some degree of social mobility.\textsuperscript{28}

But despite the persistence among free Black communities to operate schools, they were often met with harassment and threats from White policymakers and dissenters, especially those of working class status who felt their own opportunities for education were lacking. Span elaborates, citing that free Black southerners who organized schools never received the fundamental support needed to properly educate a significant number of students because:

…as a group, their existence and varying successes proved to be an anomaly in a nation premised upon a white supremacist ideology and the hereditary and lifelong enslavement of blacks. In some locales, they barely maintained a quasi-free status and, consequently, fared little better than their enslaved brethren.\textsuperscript{29}

During the Civil War, access to education for Black Americans expanded as reconstruction of the South began to take hold. With the First and Second Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862 respectively, Congress declared it legal for the federal government to seize rebel property that had been used in support of the Confederate cause. The passing of these acts made it possible for the federal government to sell land to public and private entities wishing to establish schools for former enslaved peoples across the South, though little progress was made


\textsuperscript{29} Span, “Learning in Spite of Opposition,” 33.
in this endeavor until after the war ended. In the next few years, President Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 removed all legal prohibitions against Black education in southern States. Newly freed Black Americans looked to the federal government and Union armies throughout the South for refuge and assistance.

As the Union armies fought their way through the South, thousands of refugee enslaved persons made their way to Union camps where abolitionist-inspired northern teachers, the American Missionary Association, and other benevolent societies set up camps for the “contrabands,” as refugee enslaved persons came to be known during the war. Schools were organized in many of the camps and basic grammar, literacy, reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography were taught in classrooms located in confiscated Confederate buildings, barns and stables, or in fields under trees, anywhere communities could create spaces for learning. In addition to a basic primary education, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered that the schools also provide an industrial education, writing that the enslaved male refugees were to be organized “into suitable companies for working…picking, ginning, bailing all cotton now cut and ungathered.” In conjunction with this training, freedwomen were taught sewing and alterations to make their own clothes and help mend Union uniforms. With the inclusion of industrial training in the “contraband” refugee camp school curriculum, the government set the standard for the curriculum of future Black schools by centering freedmen and women in traditional labor roles to which they had been forcibly performing for over two hundred years.

Toward the end of the war, a series of federal laws emerged that directly supported the expansion of Black education. On June 25, 1864, President Lincoln signed a bill that provided funds for both Black and White schools in Washington D.C., an act which essentially established the first public school system for Black students in the United States:

Funds shall be applied to the education of both white and colored children and that the proportion for colored children be paid to the board of trustees for colored schools, the
funds to be distributed in proportion as the number of colored children between the ages of 6 and 17 years bears to the whole number of children thereof.  

Despite this act of Congress, compliance in Washington D.C.—a geographically southern city—was sparse. It would take several subsequent acts to force local officials to provide funding for the newly established Black public schools over the course of the next decade. By modern standards, the system established in Washington was an inadequate, segregated school system that did nothing to combat the overarching societal construct of White supremacy. But in the context of American history, this initiative by Congress to formalize funding for Black education not only established the first public school system for Black Americans below the Mason-Dixon line, but laid the groundwork for future publicly funded efforts throughout the South.

Simultaneous to the work being done in the nation’s capital, northern relief societies began funding independently run schools for free Black soldiers and refugee enslaved peoples in Union defended southern territories during the Civil War. Organizations like the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society in Boston, New York’s National Freedmen’s Relief Association, and the Freedmen’s Relief Association of Pennsylvania sent resources to small schools that operated out of “colored” regiments, camps, and on seized plantations. But it was not until Congress passed “an Act to establish a Bureau for the Relief of Freedmen and Refugees” on March 3, 1865, that Black education in the South began to truly organize. More commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau (Bureau), the purpose of this government agency was to assist freedmen and women in the South during the early years of Reconstruction.

The Bureau, acting under the United States Department of War, was successful in numerous missions to support the transition into freedom for Black Americans. But it’s most widely recognized accomplishment was its creation of a network of schools funded by both the government and private benefactors to support Black academics from the primary through collegiate levels. Working heavily in collaboration with the American Missionary Association,

---

38 Although funds were focused on schools that offered primary education to Black students, the Freedmen’s Bureau is known to have contributed to the establishment of several HBCUs, including Fisk University, Hampton University, and Howard University, the latter of which was named after Oliver Otis Howard, a Civil War hero and commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau. “Today in History-November 20: Howard University,” Library of Congress, accessed October 27, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/november-20.
the organization published its own school textbooks, financially supported teachers’ training and salaries, and created a system of inspectors, superintendents, and tax commissioners that managed school operations. By the end of the Civil War in April of 1865, the Freedmen’s Bureau education program had proved successful and expanded when the federal government urged compulsory attendance for 5-14 year old students, regardless of racialized group. In the summer of the same year, West Tennessee recorded 4,095 Black pupils taught by 56 teachers in the region.\(^{39}\)

The success of the Freedmen’s Bureau school program, however, did not result in an equitable distribution of resources by any means in relation to publicly funded White schools across the country. Although enacted with monies obtained through the legislature, there was never enough to properly supply schools with the necessary infrastructure for long-term success. Many schools relied on parochial financial supplementation and operated out of church buildings, lacking the adequate furniture and educational materials to function properly. But these schools were a luxury by comparison to those in rural areas, many of which were run in dilapidated lodges, sheds, and cabins.\(^{40}\) (Figure 1.1) Not dissimilar to the camp schools during the War, communities welcomed any physical structures where students could convene for learning. But the built environment was often not conducive for classrooms, and the poor condition of the buildings posed health risks and significant distractions to the daily lessons, as an unnamed freedmen’s schoolteacher in Louisiana recounts of her experience:

> Arrived, found a place to live a mile and a half from the school shed. Dreadful people, dirty and vulgar, but the best I can do…Did well enough till it rained, since then I have walked three miles a day ankle deep in thick black mud that pulls off my shoes. Northing to eat but strong pork and sour bread. The school shed has no floor and the rains sweep clean across it, through the places where the window should be. I have to huddle the children first in one corner and then in another to keep from drowning or swamping.\(^{41}\)

---

But despite varying conditions, it is evident that students did not take their education for granted. Another teacher, Philadelphia-born Black activist and educator Charlotte Forten, writes of her students in South Carolina:

> I never before saw children so eager to learn, although I had had several years' experience in New England schools. Coming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them. They come here as other children go to play. The older ones, during the summer, work in the fields from early morning until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then come to school, after their hard toil in the hot sun, as bright and as anxious to learn as ever.\(^\text{42}\)

The ability to attend school was cherished by both the former enslaved population and Black students who had not been enslaved, especially in rural communities. For many, like the students Charlotte Forten describes, it was a respite from the fieldwork required of school aged children to help support their families. To convene and learn in one singular physical environment fostered a sense of safety and normalcy for Black Americans struggling to gain an economic foothold as free citizens. Schools, regardless of their insufficient facilities, created the illusion of safety for school children from the outside world. It provided scholastic opportunities

and encouragement to achieve success, and social skills that were imperative to create a sense of community pride.

As Black individuals and families began to establish homes in the South, many found work in farming and trade positions because of the skills they possessed as enslaved persons or through the limited work opportunities for free Black citizens prior to the war. The majority of rural Black southerners became tenant farmers, more commonly known as sharecroppers. The sharecropping system was the South’s economic answer to the fall of the plantation system and subsequent emancipation of its forced laborers. After the War, it quickly became an economic institution characterized by those who entered a land and labor arrangement “whereby an individual or family receives a stipulated proportion of the crops produced on a particular plot of land in return for their labor on that same plot.” Across the South, the sharecropping system mushroomed after emancipation, and newly freed enslaved people rejected the attempts of White landowners to employ them exclusively as wage hands, insisting they receive some stock of ownership in the land. As the transformation from the plantation to sharecropping system progressed in the decades after the War, it became evident that the new system was merely a small progression from the last. The freedmen’s lack of capital and credit, combined with the hostility of White southerners to Black ownership, severely restricted their ability to acquire and own land. So, as much as education was a priority, attending school was still a luxury that many Black students could only indulge in when their services were not needed in the fields or for other household chores.

Because rural sharecropping families had to abide by the farming seasons, early schools established by the Bureau met for only four to six months of the year. Schools typically closed March-May for planting and again in September and October when most crops were harvested. School curriculum focused on basic literacy and arithmetic at the primary level, adopting the ethos of “self-help and self-determination” that predominate Black institutions advocated for at

---

46 McKenzie, “Sharecropping,” 64.
47 Williams, Self-Taught, 134.
the time. As more schools in the Bureau’s program were built, the curriculum expanded to include industrial training in agriculture, trade, and domestic work as the camp schools had taught during the Civil War. Despite support among both Black and White populations who argued this type of schooling was important for economic advancement among the Black racialized people, limited access to traditional liberal arts subject matter coupled with the focus on industrial training to support sharecropping kept former enslaved persons squarely confined within the constructed system of White supremacy. Because the curriculum of freedmen’s schools focused on teaching Black students a trade, White opposition diminished as the Bureau’s schools became more prolific. White southerners began to see the benefits of educating formerly enslaved persons as tradesmen and field hands to become better workers. The Bureau leaned into this mentality and even advocated for it, hoping it would reduce hostility from White objectors.

Historian David Phillips explains that:

…instead of working for the interest of the blacks, many officers of the Bureau worked for the ex-masters’ interests. Not only did [Commissioner] Howard’s Bureau deny freedmen the promised “forty acres and a mule,” but neither did the Bureau schools prepare them for meaningful freedom but kept them on hold.

Overall, however, the Freedmen’s Bureau was a success in its own right as the first national attempt by the federal government, albeit both flawed and limited, to establish a publicly funded school system for Black students. It is estimated that the Bureau’s education program spent a total of five million dollars to set up schools for Black students during its tenure, $400,000 of which was spent on teacher-training institutions. From its inception in 1865 to its dissolution seven years later, scholars believe the agency opened almost 1,800 schools with over 100,000 Black students and 2,800 teachers throughout the South, a massive advancement in the efforts to establish education for Black students since before the Civil War. The agency was abolished in 1872 when state education officials and church parishes had begun to take over

---


49 The industrial training curriculum of Black schools is further discussed and analyzed in Chapters Two and Three. Williams, Self-Taught, 144-155.


51 It is impossible to ascertain the exact number of schools established, students taught, and teachers employed with Freedmen’s Bureau funding given the disaggregated and often total lack of statewide data pertaining to the organization. William Troost, “Freedmen’s Bureau,” EH.Net Encyclopedia, Economic History Association, 2008, accessed October 27, 2022, [https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-freedmens-bureau/](https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-freedmens-bureau/).
administration of the schools as southern states passed legislation to support tax-funded public schools. Northern interest in reconstructing the South had waned, and public funding for Black schools would remain a patchwork effort well into the Jim Crow Era.

**Tennessee’s Education Legislation through Reconstruction**

In Tennessee, the patterns of early education for Black southerners followed those of the greater South. After the enslaved persons revolt in Virginia led by Nat Turner in 1831, most southern states passed laws that prohibited teaching enslaved persons to read and write. The three that did not include Maryland, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Therefore, prior to the Civil War, Tennessee was one of only a few southern states whose laws generally permitted educating free Black citizens and enslaved peoples. The 1834 revision of the Tennessee state constitution supported “knowledge, learning and virtue” as “being essential to the preservation of republican institutions” and furthermore established a local and statewide tax-supported “common school fund…the interest thereof shall be inviolably appropriated to the support and encouragement of common schools throughout the state, and for the equal benefit of all the people thereof.”

However the verbiage to codify tax-supported common schools for Black students was lacking. Tennessee’s well-established economic institution of slavery and the limited rights awarded to free Black citizens in the state meant that almost no value was placed on supporting Black schools with tax revenue in the vague language of the 1834 revision. Access to publicly funded education remained incredibly limited and decentralized in the years leading up to the Civil War, even for White students. Consequently, free Black southerners were typically excluded entirely from the state’s minimal resources and were certainly unwelcome in White schools.

On June 8, 1861, Tennessee became the last state to secede from the Union and join the Confederacy after the Civil War began. The state’s geographic proximity and economic ties to the North caused reluctance and mixed interest in secession, particularly between mountainous Eastern Tennesseans who remained loyal to the Union and Middle and West Tennesseans who favored secession in order to maintain the institution of slavery they felt was necessary to defend their economic investment in the agricultural plantation system. Although some small independent schools for free Black children continued to operate in Tennessee during the Civil War.

---

52 Tennessee Const. art.11, §10, 1834.

War, it is reasonable to assume that enrollment was low as a result of conscription laws passed by both armies that enlisted Black men, geographic shifts in the Black population caused by those who fled the state, and a general lack of resources allocated to education in favor of war efforts.\(^{54}\)

It was the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction years that marked the real beginning of organized efforts by Black Tennesseans to establish institutions of public education. Black schools were most often founded and operated with support from independent freedmen’s aid organizations, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen’s Bureau, as was the case in other southern states.\(^{55}\) In November 1865, only seven months after the end of the Civil War and eight months after the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau, senior officer of the Bureau Clinton B. Fisk sent a report to Major General Oliver Otis Howard, the U.S. commander of the Bureau in Washington D.C., stating that 9,084 pupils had been taught by 138 teachers in Tennessee schools established by the Bureau during the months of August and September of that year. These numbers do not thoroughly represent the total number of Black schools operating in Tennessee at the time given the report’s exclusion of statistics pertaining to previous months and additional schools operating independently outside of the Bureau by Christian organizations and other private benefactors. Nonetheless, they represent the rapidly growing numbers of enrolled free Black students after the conclusion of the War. Fisk elaborates on the program’s continued growth, relaying that:

In addition to the free schools above enumerated, the Colored people have sustained many independent schools in Louisville, Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville. The number of pupils in the free schools will be largely increased in the reports for October not yet received at this Office. The Cause of Education is steadily progressing. The Freedmen are earnest in their efforts to acquire knowledge. The prospect of the adoption of a school law for Tenn. by the present Legislature, providing for the education of all without distinction of color is very good. The bill admitting the colored man to the witness box in all the State Courts has already passed the Senate—its passage in the lower house is considered certain—and the cause of Freedom and Justice in this section of the Country may be safely set down as "Marching On."\(^{56}\)


The law to which Fisk refers was the Public School Law of March 1867. The statute was one of several passed in Tennessee that extended rights to newly freed Black citizens when reconstruction efforts increased after it became the first state to rejoin the Union on July 24, 1866. As a result of these laws, Tennessee saw a vast expansion of rights for its Black citizens in the immediate years following the Civil War, such as the right to bear witness, as Fisk recounts.\(^57\) While other former Confederate states begrudgingly adopted universal citizenship for Black Americans via military enforcement, Tennessee was quick to mend its relationship with the North by swiftly ratifying the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments in 1865 and 1866, respectively.\(^58\) A series of laws passed through the legislature by Tennessee’s general assembly in the coming years, and Black Tennesseans were for the first time able to legally make contracts, inherit property, to sue, to hold equal benefits and protections under law, to hold office, and to vote.\(^59\) Among these rights awarded to Tennessee’s new citizens was the right to receive a publicly funded education, as written by law in the 1867 Public School statute.

The provisions of the Public School Law “passed an act for the reorganization, supervision, and maintenance of the common schools,” thus establishing the first state regulated public school system. The statute provided tax-generated revenue that would be allocated for public schools, created a state superintendent of education, and took further steps to ensure county supervision. However, the legislation did not establish one singular system of schools for all Tennessee students.\(^60\) Instead, two separate systems were chartered—one for White students and one for Black students—providing that “each civil district in the state establish one or more special schools for Negro children when the number should exceed twenty-five, so as to afford


\(^58\) The years between 1865-1871 came to be known as the Radical Reconstruction period in the postwar South. Named for the Radical Republicans in Congress who maintained control of the legislative body, the time period represented the Union’s steadfastness in legislative reform across the South to enforce universal freedom attained by the country’s new Black citizens. The period was characterized by the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 and 1868, which “sent federal troops to the South to oversee the establishment of state governments that were more democratic.” Because Tennessee had already voluntarily rejoined the Union and willingly adopted the new legislative agenda, it was exempt from military control and integrated back into the Union relatively peacefully by comparison to other Southern states. R.L. McDonnold, “The Reconstruction Period in Tennessee,” The American Historical Magazine 1, no. 4 (1896): 312, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/42657113](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42657113).

\(^59\) In the same month as the public school statute was passed, Black Tennesseans earned the right to vote and hold political office, three years before the passage of the federal 15th Amendment, which granted that right to all Black Americans. Lauder, “Black Vote,” 2010.

them as far as practicable the advantage of a common school education.” The choice to segregate schools in 1867 broadly established the start of the Jim Crow Era in Tennessee and therefore laid the foundation for a dual-school system that would remain in place for the next century until integration.

After the Public School Law passed, school funding in Tennessee remained a slow endeavor. Before any funding could be allocated to local schools, a population census had to be taken among both Black and White school aged children. Several obstacles caused delays in the census collection of Black communities, among them threats on the lives of those who dared to count the Black population for the purpose of organizing schools, especially in rural areas. Finding qualified teachers was also an issue. Many Black educators were deemed ill-equipped by the Bureau and as a result White southerners often took on teaching roles, many of whom were incompetent or fearful themselves. As writer Paul David Phillips details, “most local white teachers who were sympathetic to teaching freedmen did not because they feared social ostracism or worse. And those who dared break local social convention sometimes suffered abuse.” Consequently, it took several years to appropriate any money to Black schools across the state at all. By October 1868, only eleven schools for Black pupils had been established under the new common school law.

The determination of the Tennessee general assembly to establish two school systems after the Civil War had profound repercussions economically as well, predominately in West and Middle Tennessee where the agricultural plantation system had suddenly collapsed following the War in rural parts of the regions. When plantations were abandoned and enslaved person were emancipated, few taxable properties remained and much of the state’s population, regardless of racialized group, had been displaced following the devastation of the War. Because of this, tax

62 The dates the define the Jim Crow Era vary per southern state and remain contested by scholars. While the 1867 Public School Act of Tennessee is the first law in the state to enact legislation that codified a separation based on racialized group, many historians argue that the time period did not begin until after the Reconstruction Era officially ended in 1877. However, at least ten laws passed in Tennessee prior to 1877 that included language explicitly segregating rights by racialized group, therefore it could be argued that the Jim Crow Era in Tennessee did in fact begin in 1867. “(1866) Jim Crow Laws: Tennessee, 1866-1955,” BlackPast, last modified January 3, 2011, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/jim-crow-laws-tennessee-1866-1955/.
64 Memphis and Nashville proved to be exceptions to this issue. Both cities were independently establishing segregated public school systems for the White and Black populations at the time the 1867 law was passed and had already allocated local funding to each without the need of a census. Phillips, “Education of Blacks,” 98-109.
revenue collected for education and other welfare systems remained low, which led to a slow accumulation of the public school fund and left both the White and Black school systems completely impoverished. The economic frailty of the region was further exacerbated by historically poor crop years in 1866 and 1867, due in part to the extensive demand for labor following emancipation. As a result, private donations from benevolent supporters slowed and enrollment at the freedmen’s schools began to fluctuate. In another correspondence to General Howard in 1869, Tennessee Superintendent of Education C.E. Compton reported a total of 9,000 pupils attending freedmen’s schools for the same year, 4,188 of which were male and 4,812 were female. While these numbers only represent a decrease of about eighty-four students since Fisk’s report two years prior, they are indicative of Tennessee’s socio-political and economic instability and its effect on the newly cemented public school system that served Black students during this transitional time.

However, with property ownership now a possibility for Black Tennesseans, it was not through the new public school system but rather small, independently funded schoolhouses that Black education continued to steadily expand overall as the Bureau’s influence declined. A combination of local Black community leaders, Christian missionary organizations, local parishes, and White contributors helped build these schoolhouses across the state’s rural counties to generate opportunities for primary education in Black farming communities. The eagerness to gain an education was palpable among newly freed Black citizens, and many communities sacrificed what little income they had to contribute to buying property and construction costs in order to do so. As schools were built, enrollment grew, and many Black children had the opportunity to attend school through sixth grade for the first time in areas where freedmen’s schools were lacking. Because these efforts were grassroots and locally driven, little data exists to demonstrate the contribution rural private schools made to increase the literacy rate in Black communities across Tennessee during the Reconstruction and early Jim Crow years alongside the better documented freedmen’s schools. But it is said with certainty that private investment in Black education in Tennessee outlasted that of the Bureau, and such would remain its primary driver well into the twentieth century.

In 1870, Black Americans received the right to vote at the federal level with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Tennessee, however, refused to ratify the new constitutional legislation, in part because the state had already passed a law three years prior that afforded Black citizens the right to vote, and thus legislators felt it unnecessary since statewide elections were already being held with Black voters included. That same year, Tennessee’s constitution was once again revised, this time permanently abolishing slavery in the state. But along with notable advancements in the legislation came several stipulations aimed toward Black Americans, such as the poll tax. This provision targeted lesser income citizens, forcing them to pay an income-based tax in order to vote, which many, especially lower-earning Black citizens, could not afford. Other stipulations were less vague in rhetoric and directly targeted Black Tennesseans, among them the prohibition of interatrial marriage, the inability to ride streetcar lines that serviced White citizens, and the confirmation that “no school established or aided” by state funds “shall allow white and negro children to be received as scholars together in the same school.” Segregation had been further enshrined into the legal doctrine of the state, enforceable by government agencies, and therefore was now the societal norm between Black and White Tennesseans.

After the constitutional revision in February 1870, public education in Tennessee started to standardize. Freedmen’s Bureau officials began to relinquish control of schools established before and during the Civil War years to the public school system. School officials at the county level assumed responsibility for public education, but because school funds were scarce or non-existent, especially in the rural counties of West and Middle Tennessee, many superintendents sought aid from the Bureau for funds to build schoolhouses for Black children. Teachers at Black schools regularly petitioned the Bureau to pay their salaries, citing they had received little or no pay from the destitute public school system. Bureau agents did what little they could to provide funding for both school construction and teachers’ pay, but support ceased in the fall of 1870.

---

71 Although the poll tax in Tennessee and many other southern states targeted both lesser income Black and white citizens as well as women, statewide provisions were ultimately designed to keep Black men from voting. Miranda Fraley-Rhodes, “When Paying a Poll Tax in Tennessee was the Norm,” Tennessee State Museum, last modified April 13, 2022, https://tnmuseum.org/Stories/posts/when-paying-a-poll-tax-in-tennessee-was-the-norm?locale=en_us,
72 Tennessee Const. art.11, §12, §14, 1870.
when the Freedmen’s Bureau ended its educational work after most southern states had re-integrated into the Union and established public school systems that included education for Black students. As a result, the federal government felt Reconstruction efforts were coming to an end, and the Bureau’s program to support education was one of the first to be suspended. When the Freedmen’s Bureau formally ended all Reconstruction programs in 1872, Black Tennesseans, who now had the ability to own property, owned fifty-five buildings and grounds for the 106 freedmen’s schools that had been established in the state.73

From the 1870 constitutional revision until the turn of the twentieth century, a series of education statutes organized and reinforced the segregated dual-school system in Tennessee. In 1873, legislators passed an education reform act that became the parent act for Tennessee’s public schools system. The act was introduced following increased public support for the government to allocate funding to public schools in order to reduce the high rate of illiteracy in the state.74 With this funding, the act “provided that public schools should be free to all children residing within the school district; and that white and colored children should not be taught in the same school, but in separate schools, under the same regulations as to management, usefulness, and efficiency.”75 This ruling was significant because it mandated some semblance of equality between Black and White schools in curriculum, operations, and facilities infrastructure. The phrase “separate but equal” would not come into the vernacular until over two decades later in 1896 when the Supreme Court upheld state-imposed Jim Crow laws across the South by ruling that any legislation which codified racial segregation did not violate the U.S. Constitution “if the civil and political rights of both races be equal.”76 The Plessy v. Ferguson decision demarcated the beginning of the legally segregated Jim Crow Era in the South, which set the region on a trajectory of discriminatory lawmaking for the next half-century. But the 1873 Public School Act in Tennessee foreshadowed the sentiments of the Supreme Court’s decision because it was the first time the state’s general assembly constituted parity between the two school systems, essentially establishing the “separate but equal” ethos in no implicit terms twenty-three years prior to the ruling.

76 Justice Henry Brown majority opinion, Plessy v. Ferguson, Judgement, Decided May 18, 1896; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, Record Group 267; Plessy v. Ferguson, 163, #15248, National Archives.
In 1885, more changes were made to the segregated public school system. In that year, a law passed to expand education beyond the primary level. Secondary schools and high schools were incorporated into the public school system, but only urban areas were able to financially support the expansion with tax revenue. Meanwhile, rural areas continued to recuperate financially from the Civil War. Additional education laws passed in 1891 and 1899 that encouraged counties to build facilities for primary and secondary-level education, and to open high schools throughout the districts, with which most counties complied. Another law passed in 1901 that further secured the segregation of public education by prohibiting teachers from instructing pupils of a different racialized group. As education historian Mary Hoffschwelle explains, “while this cemented the separation of public education by race, it also reflected the reality of African Americans’ successful campaigns to secure black teachers and staffs for their schools. They strongly believed that black educators not only better understood their children’s needs but would serve as mentors and role models for black leadership.” And so as public education opportunities expanded for Black communities in the decades following the War, so too did their ability to utilize the segregated system for their own prosperity.

The Reconstruction Era in Tennessee was complicated. It was progressive for its time in that the state’s post-war legislation regarding public education not only established new opportunities for Black students without the enforcement of the federal government, but mandated uniformity between the quality of education for both the Black and White systems more than two decades before Plessy v. Ferguson mandated such equality. But the establishment of two systems at all was indicative of White sentiments at the time, which inherently placed Black schools in a position of inequity based solely on the construct of racialized groups. Subsequent education laws that expanded education for Black students beyond the primary years also carried requirements that only further entrenched segregation deeper into the fabric of societal normality. Despite provisions of sameness codified in the state constitution, Black schools remained poor and underfunded at the turn of the century as a result of discriminatory practices at the local level. The fundamental inequity established by the segregated school system
system further compounded the lack of resources Black schools received in comparison to its White counterparts, a problem that many scholars would agree persists today.\(^{80}\)

But even with underfunded programs and neglected facilities, Black Tennesseans fostered a pride in education that White communities took for granted. Both the freedmen’s schools and independently operated schoolhouses created space in education for Black students for the first time. Although the threat of violence was ever present and the spaces created were never truly secure, the ability to go to a physical place to learn propelled the self-help ethos among rural Black communities, which would reflect in their economic mobility in the century following the Civil War. At the turn of the century, enrollment in the state reflected the willingness to learn and the sacrifices made to gain an education for the former enslaved population and young generation of free Black Tennesseans. Enrollment consistently increased, and by 1900 about 55% of Black children were enrolled in school compared to 69% of White children. This percentage was up from the 44% of Black students and 58% of White students in 1879. From the modern perspective, segregation proved to be a flawed system in all respects. But it was trivial for many rural Black Tennesseans who welcomed any opportunity at all to receive an education. “Without embracing the ideology behind it,” historian Mary Hoffschwelle illustrates, “black Tennesseans turned segregation to their own purpose: to create positive community institutions that supported their children and developed the leadership potential of black educators.” In the early decades of the twentieth century, these institutions saw significant growth with the support of a new generation of partnerships: outside philanthropic funds.\(^{81}\)

**Philanthropic Investment in Black Education**

In 1901, the Southern Education Board (SEB) was established as the executive branch of the Conference for Education in the South. Made up of a coalition of both southern and northern

---

\(^{80}\) Many of Americans public school systems, particularly those in the South, continue to suffer from an inequitable distribution of resources that stems from systemic racism codified in American legislation in this time period. To learn more about the ongoing efforts to deconstruct racism and inequity in American schools, especially at the financial level, Bruce D. Baker’s works have proven instrumental: Bruce D Baker, *Educational Inequality and School Finance: Why Money Matters for America's Students* (United States: Harvard Education Press, 2018).

\(^{81}\) Hoffschwelle, “Public Education in Tennessee,” 2014. Simultaneous to the advancement of Black public schools was the initiative to establish teacher training schools across the state, known as “normal schools.” By 1900, Tennessee had established four normal schools, three of which trained White students and one, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School focused on Black vocational schooling, as was preferred by White communities for Black education. All four of the normal schools evolved into colleges and universities over the course of the twentieth century and remain in service today.
philanthropists, the SEB worked to promote public support for schools to provide students’ a better education, primarily in rural areas. The purpose of the coalition was to move the South past its tarnished reputation after the Civil War, with the hope that public education would solve the complex problems of poverty, ignorance, and racial tension in the region.\textsuperscript{82} In Tennessee, the SEB played a role in passing the instrumental 1909 General Education Act, which set aside a quarter of the state’s gross revenue for public education, 61% of which would be allocated back to counties based on their scholastic populations. But there was no provision in the law that required revenue be distributed equitably between White and Black schools, and so many counties simply used the state funds they received to benefit only White institutions.\textsuperscript{83} White property owners continued to oppose tax-generated funding for Black schools, arguing that since many Black Tennesseans did not own land, they did not pay their fair share of the taxes and were therefore less deserving of adequate support for their schools. Of course, these arguments discounted the poll tax and property tax many Black Tennesseans did pay, and completely failed to recognize why most Black Tennesseans did not own property in the first place.\textsuperscript{84}

Similarly, the SEB played by the rules of the Jim Crow Era, and thus contributed to the disenfranchisement of Black communities by appropriating most of its funding toward the advancement of rural White schools on the belief that education combined with work would naturally overcome ignorance and prejudice in the South. But regardless of its passive attitude toward racialism, the SEB did play a major role in normalizing private investment in public education, creating an “educational awakening” in the first few decades of the twentieth century, as described by historian Louis R. Harlan. At a time when the South was economically unprepared to support one White system, much less a dual-school segregated system, outside philanthropies became the standard for financial support. In its thirteen years of work, the SEB had successfully ushered in a period of philanthropic investment that would eventually make a marked difference in the quality of Black education for Tennesseans for the next three decades.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83} Hoffschwelle, “Public Education in Tennessee,” 2014.
\textsuperscript{84} Williams, \textit{Self-Taught}, 173.
\textsuperscript{85} Harlan, “Southern Education Board,” 189, 200-201.
The Peabody Fund

Among the first philanthropies to establish a presence in Tennessee was the Peabody Education Fund. Established by Massachusetts philanthropist George Peabody in 1867, the organization spent a total of $1.5 million on southern education during its thirty year tenure, primarily for rural White schools. But the Peabody Fund was significant in its contribution to Black education because of its special interest in allocating funding toward establishing normal schools, institutions that trained teachers in all areas of academics but with a primary focus on industrial training. The philanthropy donated monies to help set up several “teacher institutes” in Tennessee, and the founder’s own George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville was one of the predominate institutions at the time. As a result of the vigorous campaign to establish teacher’s training schools in the state, “Tennessee pioneered a movement for programs of industrial education, including agricultural and mechanical pursuits in the nation,” setting a precedent for other southern states, according to scholar Dick B. Clough.

By 1891, twenty-four teacher training institutions were operating statewide, eighteen of which were for White teachers and six for Black teachers. Overall, the Fund distributed only about 18-30% of its equity to Black schools, the majority of which was given to Black normal schools and a few scholarships for the education of Black teachers. Despite its inequitable distribution among Black and White schools and “separate but equal” ethos, the Peabody Fund laid the groundwork in the effort to standardize training for rural school teachers, an imperative advancement that generated qualified Black teachers to teach at public schools throughout the state. In 1914, the Peabody Educational Fund dissolved, and its remaining assets, valued at around $350,000, were transferred to the Slater Fund.

The Slater Fund

The John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen was a financial endowment first established in 1882 by John Fox Slater. It was the first philanthropic institution dedicated solely to the advancement of Black education in the South. Initially, the Fund began with a $1 million

---

88 West, “Peabody Education Fund,” 12.
dollar donation from Slater, with the purpose of “uplifting the lately emancipated population of the Southern States and their posterity by conferring on them the blessings of Christian education.” Like the Peabody Fund, the Slater Fund took specific interest in industrial training by siphoning funding toward the establishment of normal schools that trained teachers. But beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, the Slater Fund also made significant contributions to support county “training schools” for Black students, secondary schools that embraced the industrial training curriculum. The first training school established with financing from the Slater Fund was the Fayette County Training School in 1916 in Somerville, Tennessee. By the 1920s, many county training schools established with Slater funding grew to include high school grades with full academic programs such as science and liberal arts curriculums in addition to the core vocational training. As education historian Mary Hoffschwelle points out, “these vocational schools were often the first and only secondary schools for black students and provided the basis for proper high schools.” Simultaneously, the Slater Fund began subsidizing salaries for teachers in 1910, a maneuver to offset the poor pay Black teachers earned in comparison to White teachers from county school boards. Eventually the Slater Fund was absorbed into the work of the General Education Board (GEB), but the organization had a profound impact in bolstering Black education in the early twentieth century, having established twenty-two county training schools for Black students in Tennessee alone at the time of its closure.

The Jeanes Fund

Founded in 1905 by quaker philanthropist Anna T. Jeanes of Philadelphia, the Jeanes Fund was a trust created to distribute funds to assist rural schools for Black students in states across the South. Unlike other contemporary philanthropic organizations that funded and operated various programs, the Jeanes Fund focused its efforts entirely on paying the salaries of Black teachers who advocated for industrial training and school improvement at the county level. They did so by offering grants to counties that hired a supervising industrial teacher for rural

---

Black schools, and the funding was then used by the county to supplement those teachers’ salaries. Jeanes teachers, as they came to be known, supervised the curriculum of industrial schools in rural counties across Tennessee, their work evolving from vocational supervision to instructional and curriculum supervision for Black schools in the Fund’s later years. The presence of Jeanes teachers in Tennessee communities spanned from 1909-1959, and the foundation operated primarily under the umbrella of the General Education Board during its tenure.94 (Figure 1.2)

![Image of black men and women standing on the steps of a wooden school building in Calhoun County, Alabama, 1915.](image)

Figure 1.2: Black men and women, probably Jeanes teachers, standing on the steps of a wooden school building in Calhoun County, Alabama, 1915. Anna T. Jeanes Foundation Photograph Album Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

*The General Education Board*

The General Education Board (GEB) was one of the leading philanthropic foundations in the twentieth century to contribute to Black education, with substantial contributions in Tennessee specifically. Founded in 1902 by John D. Rockefeller Sr., the Board was inspired by John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s tour of industrial schools in the South one year prior, which produced a report on the needs of rural Black schools. The GEB was created to address these issues, initially focusing on improving education for both Black and White students by broadening state

---

education departments across the South. The Board tended to allocate funding directly through the state’s public school system rather than making small donations at the local level. By doing so, the foundation was able to streamline its funding and that of other foundations directly into the Black public school system. As a result, the GEB was instrumental in subsidizing the salaries for rural school supervisors and teachers at the local level, and in creating job opportunities and education programs at the state level.

In 1914, the GEB took over the Southern Education Board’s programs and continued its support for both Black and White teachers in the Tennessee Department of Public Instruction. In the same year, the Board appointed Tennessee’s first school agent responsible for all the state’s educational programs for Black students. But in keeping with the status quo of the time, Tennessee’s first “Negro State Agent” was a White male educator named Samuel L. Smith. In 1919, Tennessee was able to hire an agent for secondary education with GEB funding. Later in 1928, the state added a Division of Schoolhouse Planning, funded entirely with GEB support. Like its counterparts, the GEB did little to change the focus on industrial education that had now become the standard curriculum for Black students in rural Tennessee. But it did play a major role in subsidizing, evaluating, and monitoring the efficiency and quality of education that rural Black students received. When the GEB dissolved in 1964, it had appropriated a shocking $324.6 million dollars to various programs across the South, more than $60 million of which was spent directly on Black education.

Interest among benefactors in the cause for Black education throughout the South continued to increase in the first few decades of the twentieth century, but no philanthropic foundation would be as impactful as the Rosenwald Fund. While other foundations bolstered teacher training and salaries and made contributions to support the Black public school system at large, it was through the Rosenwald Fund that over 5,000 schoolhouses were built across the

---

American South between 1911-1932. For the first time, financial efforts were directed specifically toward the built environment, ensuring rural students had a safe and well-equipped place to attend school. Public school architecture, financing, and programming became standardized with Rosenwald funding, a monumental move which gave Black communities more autonomy over the structure of their education system. The following chapter details the structure of the Rosenwald Fund rural schools program and its subsequent legacy in creating places of meaning for rural Black communities in Tennessee.

---

Chapter 2. The Rosenwald Fund and its Rural Schools Program

The Founding Partners of the Rural School Building Program

Julius Rosenwald and the Philanthropic Mindset

To understand the ethos of the later Rosenwald Fund (Fund), it is first imperative to understand that of its founder, Julius Rosenwald. Rosenwald was born in 1862 and grew up in Springfield, Illinois as the son of German Jewish immigrants. He spent his early years learning his family’s clothing business both at home and in New York City. After several clothing business endeavors in Manhattan and Chicago early in his career, Rosenwald was offered the opportunity to invest in Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1895 at age thirty-three where he soon became Vice President. One year later, Rosenwald had taken on the company’s management on a full-time basis. In 1908, Rosenwald became President of Sears, Roebuck and Company and reorganized its operations to prioritize customer service over advertising campaigns. As his success grew in the first decade of the twentieth century, Rosenwald chartered a new course in philanthropy, largely inspired by his wife Augusta and his rabbi Emil Hirsch.100 A Progressive spokesperson for Reform Judaism in America, Hirsch imparted to Rosenwald the belief that capitalists and wealthy men had a special duty owed to society under the Jewish notion of tzedakah, or charity. Hirsch convinced Rosenwald that with his great wealth came the obligation to give back, citing that “…property entails duties, which establishes its rights. Charity is not a voluntary concession on the part of the well-situated. It is a right to which the less fortunate are entitled in justice.”101

In 1910, after early contributions to Jane Addams’ Hull House and several Jewish organizations in Chicago, Rosenwald turned his philanthropic attention to causes that supported Black Americans. He first became energized by Booker T. Washington’s autobiography Up from Slavery, within which Washington recounts the obstacles he faced as an enslaved person and his journey in academia after emancipation. But most influential to Rosenwald was the biography of the late Southern Railway executive William H. Baldwin Jr., who headed the General Education Board (GEB) and had served on the Board of Trustees for the Tuskegee Institute. As was the

racialized view at the time, Baldwin argued that Black southerners should remain working in rural towns in the South, and therefore needed support to improve their situation. He suggested that building vocational schools which also served as community social centers may be able to help with this endeavor. It is unclear exactly what about Baldwin’s writing motivated Rosenwald, but as his grandson and biographer Peter M. Ascoli writes, “perhaps the fact Baldwin had devoted time as well as money to his philanthropic efforts on behalf of blacks” struck a chord with Rosenwald’s desire and responsibility as a fellow wealthy man to give back to underprivileged communities as Rabbi Hirsch had taught. After his initial financial contributions to help establish twenty-six Black YMCA’s across the U.S., Rosenwald turned his attention to the cause for Black education in the South and began seeking partnerships to help accomplish his philanthropic duties.102

Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Philosophy

The partnership that Julius Rosenwald would soon find himself in was with prolific Black leader and author Booker T. Washington. Born into slavery in 1856, Washington self-educated after his liberation and soon became a prominent businessman, educator, and advocate among the Black elite. On the request of Hampton Institute President Samuel C. Armstrong, he became the first principal at Alabama’s Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers beginning in 1881. Only one year later, Washington purchased one hundred acres of a former plantation’s property and relocated the school, renaming it the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, or Tuskegee Institute (Tuskegee) as it was commonly called. Tuskegee’s curriculum focused heavily on industrial training with an emphasis on Christian values and morality, and students learned to teach elementary and secondary subjects like arithmetic and language arts. The structure of the curriculum closely resembled that of other contemporary Black normal schools throughout the South. But unlike many others, Tuskegee Institute would grow to include an extension school and various academic departments, eventually becoming one of the South’s premier HBCU’s by the late twentieth century.103

Tuskegee’s early success was due in part to Washington’s philosophy about how best to uplift the Black racialized group. He believed that for Black Americans to move past slavery, they needed an education in industrial training to learn trade skills that would lead to tangible job opportunities and thus provide the springboard for their upward economic mobility. Washington felt this philosophy was especially beneficial to rural southern Black Americans, many of whom found themselves in sharecropping and trade fields already. Contrary to his contemporary, Professor W.E.B. Du Bois, the racialized people’s greatest advocate for intellectual pursuits and liberal arts training at the time, “Washington advocated a gradualist rather than a radical approach to improving conditions for blacks in the post-Emancipation period, with hard work and self-help as the primary channels to economic and social advancement.”104 As a result of this ethos, Tuskegee’s expansive industrial curriculum included training for men and women in thirty three trades such as agriculture, carpentry, blacksmithing, machinery, brick masonry, tailoring, sewing, dressmaking, basketry, housekeeping, cooking, and nursing, and many others.105 After their training, Washington encouraged Tuskegee students “to return to the plantation districts and show the people there how to put new energy and new ideas into farming as well as into the intellectual and moral and religious life of the people.”106 It was his hope that graduates of Tuskegee and other Black institutions would find not only practicality, but dignity and pride in the labor skills they learned and that their enslaved ancestors had mastered.107

Washington’s philosophy gained traction across the United States, and he soon became a skilled fundraiser for the Tuskegee Institute. He often travelled to northern cities like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to recruit Black educators and meet with investors to help expand upon his work at the school, soliciting large donations from both Black and White individuals and organizations during his tenure. Washington’s advocacy for self-reliance among Black individuals was attractive to Progressive White philanthropists, and he was able to persuade many wealthy White politicians and industry leaders to donate to Tuskegee by appealing to their segregationist values and theories about Black mobility during the Jim Crow Era. Among the

105 Booker T. Washington, Industrial Education for the Negro, (South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Pub. 2013 [1903]).
supporters of Tuskegee were prominent businessmen J.P. Morgan, Collis P. Huntington, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller. Washington argued, and they agreed, that the best way to ensure equal rights for Black Americans was to exhibit “industry, thrift, intelligence, and property.” As Rosenwald historian Mary Hoffschwelle points out, “this strategy of accommodating education to white sentiment undermined Washington’s intellectual argument for industrial education, yet it was the basis for his popularity.”

While the bootstrap mentality was popular among Washington’s White allies, many Black leaders, including Professor Du Bois, felt that Washington’s strategy was too accommodating of the White supremacist status quo and belittled the intellect of former enslaved persons and the young free generation, reducing their worth to repeated patterns of labor that existed during the years of enslavement. But despite his criticism and often radically opposing views, Du Bois recognized Washington as one of the first true Black intellectuals in the United States who had the best intentions for the Black racialized group in mind, and both educators agreed that education played a pivotal role in Black mobility. Du Bois was particularly impressed with Washington’s successful partnership with philanthropist Julius Rosenwald to create rural schools across the American South, a partnership through which Washington’s self-help philosophy would spread throughout the region.

---

The Early Years at Tuskegee: Establishing the Rural Schools Program and its Architecture

The Macon County Project and Early Experimentation, 1905-1910

Washington was already invested in the cause of Black rural education even before his collaboration with Rosenwald began. Beginning in 1905, he embarked on the first initiative to erect small schoolhouse buildings through one of the many ancillary community programs of the Tuskegee Institute. Headed by Washington and his colleague Clinton J. Calloway, Director of Tuskegee’s Extension Department, an experimental program was created to bring funding and infrastructure to disenfranchised rural Black students in Macon County, Alabama. Tuskegee’s home county, the program provided students an industrial education that paralleled Washington’s ethos of self-help success that flourished at Tuskegee. The program was deemed the Macon County Project, and it was funded by one of Washington’s benefactors, Henry Huttleston Rogers of Standard Oil Company. Additional support came from the Jeanes Fund and Macon County’s Black community, which was excited to build public schools after the original Black county schools had suffered financial ruin and violence from White residents in previous decades.

Calloway, who took charge of the experiment, mounted an expansive campaign to establish schools throughout Macon County by appealing to community members and White patrons with the allure of Rogers and Jeanes funding to match their contributions. By 1910, forty-six total schools had been constructed in districts throughout the County, each costing about $700. Thanks to Calloway’s advertising campaign, many Black farming families moved to Macon County in search of agricultural opportunities within close proximity to the best Black schools in the state. When Rogers passed away, funding from his family soon ended, and the success of the Macon County project left Washington in search of a new benefactor to help expand the program beyond the boundaries of Macon County.113

Formulating a Partnership and Initial Investment in Rural Schools, 1911-1912

Washington’s hunt for financial support took him to northern cities including Chicago, where the budding philanthropist Julius Rosenwald hosted a luncheon for Washington at the Blackstone Hotel on May 18, 1911. After their first meeting and a series of correspondences, Rosenwald visited Tuskegee by Washington’s invitation in the fall of the same year. Rosenwald

was accompanied by Rabbi Hirsch and L. Wilbur Messer, general secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association of Chicago who had connected the philanthropist with the “Wizard of Tuskegee.” Washington, ever the salesman, appealed to Rosenwald’s desire to give back by assuring him that the work at Tuskegee was a noble cause for the advancement of the Black racialized group through industrial training and moral discipline. The trip lasted only four days, but was packed with a schedule of campus tours and introductions to faculty members and students. When he returned to Chicago, Rosenwald told a reporter, “I don’t believe there is a white industrial school in America or anywhere that compares to Mr. Washington’s at Tuskegee.”

But despite Rosenwald’s Progressive willingness to support Black education, Washington knew his potential benefactor’s motivation was similar to that of other philanthropists that were already heavily invested in the cause for Black education at the time. He was aware that Rosenwald’s intentions were largely premised on the belief that education for Black Americans would combat illiteracy and ignorance, therefore allowing Black citizens to reach their full potential in the job market and avoid a life of poverty and potentially, crime. Rosenwald, like many of his Progressive White peers, felt “the concept of citizenship for black Americans was dependent on blacks’ class and access to education, limiting its potential to help blacks achieve full equality.” Instead of rejecting the mentality of the White elites, Washington embraced it as he had with donors prior and was able to convince Rosenwald to invest in Tuskegee through the persuasive argument that the school program was an effort for Black southerners to attain fair treatment and economic advancement, rather than civil rights. Rosenwald was so persuaded by Washington’s rhetoric that he joined Tuskegee’s Board of Trustees in December 1911, a move that officially cemented their partnership.

After a series of correspondences, meetings, trips, and donations from Rosenwald directly to Tuskegee Institute, the financial relationship and budding friendship between the philanthropist and Washington shifted toward the cause for rural education, specifically. In July 1912, Rosenwald wrote to Washington, asking the educator, “if you had $25,000 to distribute among institutions which are offshoots from Tuskegee or doing similar work to Tuskegee, how

---

114 University of Chicago Library, Julius Rosenwald Papers, scrapbook 14, 37, *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1911, quoted in Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald*, 89.
would you divide it?" Rosenwald’s inquiry created the perfect opportunity for Washington to outline his plan to resurrect the Macon County Project on a wider scale to his new benefactor. Eagerly, Washington responded to Rosenwald in a series of letters over the next few months. He cleverly framed his idea for a rural school building program as an experiment without mentioning previous investors like Rogers, knowing that Rosenwald would be most interested in a program he could call his own. In so many words, Washington detailed his observations of the successes of the program in Macon County and provided proof that Calloway and the Tuskegee Extension Department’s work building rural schools in Alabama had indeed united rural Black communities over the idea of school improvement via the self-help philosophy. To support his argument that better school facilities in rural areas were of paramount importance to create a public school system that paralleled that of urban areas, Washington described the current state of the Black schools in the greater rural South, writing to Rosenwald that if he were to implement a philanthropic program, “I should hope that the scheme would carry with it a plan for building school-houses as well as extending the school terms. Many of the places in the South where the schools are now taught are as bad as stables, and it is impossible for the teacher to do efficient work in such places.” He argued the importance of physical school facilities and the necessary infrastructure to support them, contending that better school buildings create better access to education and social spaces for Black and White southerners alike. Washington’s stance paralleled that of Rosenwald, who also believed public spaces were imperative to the progress of both racialized peoples, an attitude exemplified in his numerous YMCA building projects.

Washington’s appeal to Rosenwald for a rural school building program was lengthy and comprehensive. He explained the current situation in the South pertaining to discriminatory funding and allocation of resources for public schools, proposed a Tuskegee leader be selected to supervise allocation of Rosenwald’s contributions and handle relations with local White leaders, and introduced the idea of extending school terms to attract better teachers supported by the Jeanes Fund, among other ideas. But it was Washington’s recommendation to create a partnership not only between Rosenwald, Tuskegee, other philanthropic funds, and local Black

---

117 Washington Papers, “Rosenwald, Julius 1912 July-Oct.,” box 76, reel 69, Special Correspondence, Washington to Rosenwald, July 20, 1912, quoted in Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 32.
communities, but one that also included White public school officials that set a precedent for the structure of the rural schools program moving forward. Knowing state agents held the purse strings for local public school systems, Washington felt that including superintendents and county officials would increase equitable distribution of funds and grow the program with less resistance from White southerners than had been encountered by the Freedmen’s Bureau and other supporters of Black schools in the past. Washington assured Rosenwald that entering such a “joint-effort” would lay the foundation the program’s future success.118

Once again persuaded by Washington’s thorough arguments, Rosenwald committed to his $25,000 proposed donation, which was announced at his fiftieth birthday celebration on August 12, 1912. The donation was part of a larger contribution of $687,500 that Rosenwald dispersed between various causes. But his donation to Tuskegee was particularly noteworthy as it was the first philanthropic donation aimed directly at the advancement of southern Black education through the construction of rural schools at a program-wide level.119 Washington had proven successful in his endeavor to acquire funding, and the quest to expand and improve the built environment for rural Black students began.

Washington's Proposal and the Rural School Experiment, 1912-1914

Once Rosenwald’s contribution was secured, the partners began to communicate about the structure of the rural school building program. Both men knew they could incorporate funding from other philanthropic organizations to support the financial burden of building rural schools. They obtained a partnership with the Jeanes Fund, for example, to help supplement teacher salaries and ensure quality of education remained strong in each rural school. Jeanes teachers and supervisors also worked to support Rosenwald school building campaigns in their local communities as the program grew. Later, the Slater Fund and General Education Board helped provide funding for vocational training equipment at some of the program’s rural schools.120 Although additional investment was necessary to accomplish their operational goals, the need for physical school facilities remained the focus of the initiative.

118 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 30-32.
119 Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald, 129, 133, Hoffschwelle The Rosenwald Schools, 33.
120 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 44, 59.
In August and September 1912, Washington sent Rosenwald another wave of ideas in an initial letter followed by a new proposal that further detailed the plans for the program currently in preparation at Tuskegee. In his correspondence, Washington petitioned Rosenwald to use some of the funding from his birthday grant to create the experimental pilot program that would help Washington, Calloway, and other Tuskegee leaders gauge the success of their school building plan:

> We are giving some careful, and I hope serious attention to the suggestion of making a plan for the helping of colored people in the direction of small country schools. In Connection with this idea, I am wondering if you would permit us to make an experiment in the direction of building six school-houses at various points, preferably near here, so that we can watch the experiment closely out of the special fund which you have set aside for small schools.\(^{121}\)

Washington went on to detail the cost breakdown of the experiment’s school construction efforts, writing that he and his colleagues at Tuskegee would be able to build each school with $2,800 of unappropriated money from the initial donation, with each school costing about $350 of the funds. In keeping with the ethos of self-reliance, he then reiterated the requirements from the partners’ past correspondences that communities had to meet in order to obtain a Rosenwald grant for new school construction, two of which created a template for how the Rosenwald Fund would later operate until the school building program ended in 1932.

The first requirement communities had to meet was local support via donations of either money or time, labor, and materials. Because each school in the experiment would cost about $600 total to build, it was necessary for local Black communities to match the funding for their own school construction. Neither Washington nor Rosenwald believed in handouts, and both agreed the challenge-grant structure would incentivize communities to raise funds in collaboration with local White supporters and school officials who saw value in erecting public schoolhouses for Black students. Where lesser income Black southerners could not provide financial contributions for a school, the program would encourage donations like materials and labor to reinforce the need for local involvement in the physical building process, an idea that stemmed from the bootstrap logic deeply engrained at Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and its ancillary programs. Without local support, the financial ability to match philanthropic donations,

\(^{121}\) Washington Papers, “Rosenwald, Julius 1912 July-Oct.,” box 76, reel 69, Special Correspondence, Washington to Rosenwald, 31 August and 12 September 1912, quoted in Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 33.
and the materials needed to construct a school, communities would not be eligible to receive a Rosenwald grant. As a result, outreach, publicity campaigns, and grassroots community engagement were vital tools to ensure the success of the program. Historian Peter Ascoli points out the inherent discrimination of this requirement enacted by the Fund, which was not expected of White communities to construct their own public schools:

…blacks who paid for Rosenwald schools were, in essence, being taxed twice, once through taxation of services that were never performed, and the second time by giving their own hard-earned funds for schools that state and local governments should have provided in the first place…

Despite the obvious inequities woven into in the program’s framework, Ascoli continues that, “the fact remains that at last local governments were [finally] doing something for black education.”\(^\text{122}\)

The second community requirement to qualify for Rosenwald aid was that any school built by the program had to be operated by the county public school system, rather than privately. The requirement demonstrated Washington’s commitment to interracial partnerships. This measure of his demanded cooperation between local Black communities and public school officials and ensured later tax revenue would, in fact, be allocated to Black schools in the era of Jim Crow discriminatory practices that permeated the distribution of public school funding. He knew that for schools to qualify for state aid, they had to be deeded to the state. Washington’s suggestion to enter a land-based partnership with White school boards exemplified his continued dedication to collaborative efforts between the Black and White racialized groups in the cause of advancing Black education. He believed that the partnership between rural Black communities and the state would create more opportunities to build schoolhouses because involving White officials and local landowners, rather than ostracizing them from the program’s efforts, would progress the cause further with less opposition from White dissenters, and perhaps give officials the sense of belief that they had actually done the work to build Black schools themselves. To obtain grant funding, many local Black landowners across the South sold or donated their land acquired after the Civil War to the state, a move that earned Washington some criticism among rural Black landowners. Nonetheless, this requirement created opportunities for land-based

\(^{122}\) Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald, 152.
donations for the school building program and contributed to the overall advancement of public rather than private education for Black southerners.\textsuperscript{123}

Anxious to lift the experiment out of development and into action, Washington concluded his proposal by reiterating the importance of community and individual uplift for the Black racialized people. His rhetoric reinforced the era’s Progressive beliefs, particularly that “education was a public responsibility, and access to public education an essential right of citizenship.” Both Washington and Rosenwald held this view, and therefore “expected public funding in addition to community and philanthropic contributions” for the new school building program.\textsuperscript{124} Ultimately, Washington’s lengthy letter to the Chicago philanthropist implemented several key principals that would mold the rural school building program, as epitomized by Rosenwald scholar Mary Hoffschwelle:

First, physical structures—new school buildings—would provide the catalyst for further educational improvements. Second, Rosenwald aid would provide an incentive for local support, both private and public. Third, local support, both by black community members and white school authorities, would renew and expand everyone’s commitment to black children’s education. Consequently, community members could donate time, labor, and material in lieu of or as supplements to cash contributions for the grant match, not only to accommodate their meager cash resources but also to encourage their physical participation in schoolhouse construction. White school officials, on the other hand, could add a valuable property to their public school plant with only a small investment of public funds. And fourth, community involvement would require expert leadership, in this case a Tuskegee-appointed organizer who would provide the needed supervision and coordination.\textsuperscript{125}

Rosenwald quickly accepted Washington’s proposal to erect six schools in three counties neighboring Tuskegee Institute, and by the fall of 1912 the first experimental schools funded by Rosenwald’s donation were in progress. All six schools were completed by the spring of 1914, with the Loahopoka School in Lee County, Alabama being the first school built with Rosenwald funding to be dedicated.\textsuperscript{126} Until the summer of 1914, Washington and Calloway focused their rural school building efforts entirely on monitoring their success in implementing Washington’s principles. They sent multiple correspondences to Rosenwald over the course of the experiment,

\textsuperscript{123} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 30-53.
\textsuperscript{124} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 34-35, 30.
\textsuperscript{125} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 34.
\textsuperscript{126} S. L. Smith, \textit{Builders of Goodwill: The Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910 to 1950} (Nashville: Tennessee Book Company, 1950), 64.
including letters of appreciation and progress updates, photographs, papers written by Tuskegee instructors about fundraising efforts in the selected Black communities, and a report by Clinton J. Calloway with budgetary reports for the project. After its two year incubation period, the school experiment proved successful and subsequently set the framework for the expansion of the school building program into a larger construction program that would soon take hold throughout the rural South.

Growing the Program Beyond Alabama, 1914-1915

When Rosenwald saw the program’s early success, he was glad to donate more funding to the cause. In June 1914, he agreed to contribute up to $30,000 to aid in constructing as many as one hundred more school buildings over the next five years. Rosenwald’s second large donation became a jumping off point for Tuskegee to move forward with a standard plan to erect schoolhouses further from its reach. Although it had been in the works since the Chicago philanthropist’s initial birthday donation, Washington and his colleagues at Tuskegee finally completed the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses” in the fall of 1914. The document was intended to serve as an instruction manual for potential participating communities by outlining the purpose of the Rosenwald-funded school building program and the necessary requirements to acquire grant money. The document also acted as a “foundational document” for its program leaders Booker T. Washington, Clinton J. Calloway, and other Tuskegee executive council members at the Institute. The “Plan” was the first official document pertaining to the joint partnership between Rosenwald and Washington that was meant for public circulation.

The “Plan” put into writing each of the ideas Washington had illustrated in his previous correspondences to Rosenwald in a formal document. It first made clear that the Rosenwald grant money was meant only to supplement efforts already initiated by local communities with the support and approval of school officials. The document also summarized requirements pertaining to the Jeanes teachers and state Negro school agents, and addressed grant expenses, stating that Rosenwald funding would match donations already generated by the community, but would be capped at $350 total per school. The document expanded opportunities for structures with more than a one-teacher classroom which had been the standard for the first six schools

127 Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald*, 138-139.
erected during the experimental phase, and extended the school year to approximately eight months. Lastly, the “Plan” mandated that Tuskegee Extension Department officials approve all proposed building plans to ensure a standard of design quality across the program’s schools.

The initial scope of the larger-scale program was to include additional Alabama counties only, however the project quickly expanded on the advice of Washington’s peers and the sheer volume of interest in Rosenwald funding after the “Plan” had been publicized. A flood of correspondence arrived at Tuskegee from across the region that made claims for funding with detailed descriptions of local communities’ urgent needs for school building facilities. Letters were sent from a broad spectrum of petitioners including residents, ministers, teachers, superintendents, and state officials. Washington’s aspirations for the program were coming to fruition, and although this phase of the expansion still focused on Alabama schoolhouses, Tuskegee authorized funding for a model school in Georgia and would soon review applications from other neighboring states including Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Tennessee, however, would not yet benefit from Rosenwald funding, Washington having believed that the cause for rural Black public education in the state was not quite as dire as other states deeper in the South.129

The inundation of applications made clear to Washington and Rosenwald that rural Black communities were motivated to build better school facilities for their students and teachers and to revive school building campaigns from the Reconstruction and Civil War eras. Because many applications had been sent to Tuskegee by White school officials who embraced the idea of building Black schools with combined public and private funding, the partners knew the foundational structure of their program was a success. Rosenwald historian Peter Ascoli elaborates, stating that “one could argue that it was not the actions taken by the usually timorous General Education Board, but [Julius Rosenwald’s] challenge grants that finally mobilized local governments to action.”130 The new program received so much attention that even W.E.B. Du Bois, Washington’s toughest critic, continually published updates on the Rosenwald building program in his publication the Crisis, having been a supporter of the philanthropic partnership and the building program’s mission to provide primary and secondary education to Black

129 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 41-47.
130 Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald, 152.
students across the South.\textsuperscript{131} On his annual trip to Tuskegee in February 1915, Rosenwald, along with forty-one guests, toured several rural schools in the vicinity of the Tuskegee Institute and for the first time saw the fruits of his philanthropic work in action.

From this point forward, the Rosenwald school building program, as it had come to be known, was primarily conducted by the right hand men of both partners. At Tuskegee, Clinton J. Calloway oversaw the expansion of the program. Assisting his efforts was Booker T. Washington Jr., who served as the program’s first Rosenwald building field agent, a new position that would oversee grant allocations and construction at the local level using both Jeanes and Rosenwald funding as the program grew.\textsuperscript{132} In Chicago, Rosenwald passed along supervising duties to William C. Graves, an assistant who had been helping him with the rural school project correspondence.\textsuperscript{133} Although Rosenwald and Washington continued their correspondence and made all final decisions, this move marked a shift in the program, signaling its growth and the need for more involvement on behalf of both parties.

Throughout 1915, the building program continued to expand, largely as a result of Rosenwald’s visit to Tuskegee and its neighboring rural schools and his ensuing excitement about the program. (Figure 2.1) In April, the supervisors extended Rosenwald benefits to additional schools across Alabama and began to act on applications from other southern states, Tennessee included. This move officially extended the Rosenwald school building program across state lines and into the broader region of the American South. Hoffschwelle writes that accepting only a small number of applications from out of state candidates set “a precedent for the annual allocations of specific numbers of buildings to individual states that would become a standard practice for the Rosenwald program.” Although the Rosenwald Fund would not formally incorporate until several years later, it was the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses” and the program’s subsequent expansion that led to the birth of what then became known as the “Rosenwald schools.”\textsuperscript{134} Expressing gratitude to his benefactor, Washington

\textsuperscript{131} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 41-47; Ascoli, \textit{Julius Rosenwald}, 141.
\textsuperscript{132} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 48-52. Ascoli, \textit{Julius Rosenwald}, 143.
\textsuperscript{133} Ascoli, \textit{Julius Rosenwald}, 142.
\textsuperscript{134} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 48-51. The “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses” was revised several times in 1915 to address the requirements of Rosenwald Agents and clarify requirements for grant funding. To read more about these changes, see: Mary S. Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools of the American South} (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006): 51-52.
expressed his sentiments regarding the significant gravity of the school building program in rural communities:

It is impossible for us to describe in words the good that this schoolhouse building is accomplishing—not only in providing people with comfortable school buildings who never knew what a decent school building was before, but even in changing and revolutionizing public sentiment in the South as far as Negro education is concerned.135

Later correspondence from Rosenwald to his wife after another trip to Alabama mirrored Washington’s affections, bolstering the philanthropist’s Progressive ideas about Black education and the work being done through Tuskegee:

We went direct to the school [Tuskegee] but passed four new schools on the way—all were waiting to welcome me and had signs ‘Welcome Mr. Rosenwald’—to school. I just stopped long enough to go inside and to thank them for the reception. Such enthusiasm as they evidenced! I am greatly pleased with this work. Not alone it helps them to help themselves but it will serve the community in many ways for years.136

---


The Design of the Rosenwald Schools

Perhaps the most significant element that characterized Rosenwald schools from the program’s inception was their design and architectural features. In the Macon County Project and initial Rosenwald rural school building experiment, good design was secondary to the outright need for buildings at all. Similarly, as the program began to expand, the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses” offered almost no design instruction, although communities were required to have their plans approved by Tuskegee. The primary concern was to construct as many school buildings as possible at low cost. “The cheaper we can build these schoolhouses,” Washington wrote, “the more Mr. Rosenwald is going to be encouraged to let us have additional money.”

Simultaneously, Washington expressed concern over erecting school buildings that may in fact be better than White school facilities. He worried that if Black schools were architecturally superior to White schools it may foster resentment toward the program and leave Rosenwald schools at risk of arson attacks by hostile White communities, a terrifying recurrence in the history of Black rural schools. As a result of his concerns, Washington employed Calloway in the spring of 1913 to draft a brochure of guidelines to circulate in rural communities that delineated architectural criteria and standards for constructing modestly designed school buildings within the Rosenwald school building program.

While Washington and Calloway retain credit for their determination to bring industrial education to Black children in the South, it is Tuskegee architect and Director of the Industrial Program Robert Robinson Taylor who deserves acknowledgement for establishing the design standard for the rural schools program at Tuskegee. Taylor believed that “for lack of a plan,” pre-existing Black schools across the South “do not look well and are not conveniently arranged.” He had already been working to change this, with sketch plans and drafted standards for one-, two-, and three-room training schools in his early years at Tuskegee. When the Rosenwald school building experiment began, Washington asked Taylor to draft plans for a schoolhouse design that could be built as a prototype for the Rosenwald partnership using the allotted $600

---

138 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 52. Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald, 150-151.
per school. The plans were used to estimate manufacturing costs by Sears Roebuck engineers in Chicago. When Rosenwald then suggested the schools be manufactured as kits for mass production at a Sears warehouse, Washington—who had been encouraged by his philosophy of self-help and both Calloway and Taylor’s persistent input that it would be cheaper to build locally—told Rosenwald that communities must build the schools themselves to foster a sense of belonging and to encourage locals to donate to school building efforts for needed construction materials, rather than being handed the prefabricated resources.\footnote{Witold Rybczynski, “Remembering the Rosenwald Schools,” Architect Magazine, September 16, 2015.} Rosenwald agreed, a move that exemplified his trust in Washington and his dedication to the program as a personal philanthropic venture separate from his business interests.\footnote{Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 37-38.} Once again, Washington used his skillful persuasion tactics to advance the ideology that bottom-up industrialization was the best way forward for the Black racialized group.

When Calloway approached Taylor with Washington’s request for a formal pamphlet to complement the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses,” Taylor went to work on creating its drawings. The project was a collaborative effort between Calloway, Taylor, notable agriculture scientist George Washington Carver, and Alabama Negro school agent J.L. Sibley. The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community was finally published two years later in 1915. The pamphlet contained architectural drawings by Taylor and his students in the Industrial Program at Tuskegee, along with written text by the other collaborators. It thoroughly detailed vocational curriculum standards and offered suggestions for ways to use school facilities as social community centers for clubs and other relevant organizations. Professor Carver also provided landscaping suggestions and schematics that offered insight for small scale agricultural production on school grounds. The pamphlet circulated throughout rural southern communities with the hope of standardizing design plans for Black schools that correlated to that of White ones by presenting the argument that an industrial curriculum was the best suited means by which to uplift the economic situation of Black southerners.\footnote{Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 52-56.} The Negro Rural School was met with positive feedback, as Arkansas Negro school agent Leo M. Favrot recounts to Sibley: “That
pamphlet...is one of the best things of its kind I have ever seen...I am going to fasten mine to my desk in some way so it will never get away from me.”

Instead of organizing the architectural designs by school size as Calloway and Taylor had previously, this time they drafted plans based on purpose so that each school typology would be better categorized. The pamphlet included ten separate plans for schools ranging from one-room to two-story buildings that fell under three typologies: the one-teacher school, the central school, and the county training school. Prior to the pamphlet’s publication, Black schools were typically constructed with one classroom only, as had been the case in Tuskegee’s early experimentation phases. (Figure 2.2) Taylor and his colleagues expanded the floor plans to include outhouses, a cloakroom, additional lecture rooms, industrial training rooms, and sometimes a library, kitchen, and teacher’s quarters or houses depending on school typology. These rooms were designed to be partitioned from the main classroom to create a division of space that encouraged higher enrollment and community and social gatherings outside of class time. Ancillary spaces like playground, ball fields, and gardens were incorporated into the design plans to emphasize public health and physical activity among students as well.

144 Alabama Department of Education Records, Favrot to Sibley, 26 August 15, folder “C,” SG 15444, Rural School Agent Correspondence, quoted in Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 54.
145 Weiss, Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee, 125-127.
146 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 55.
Figure 2.2: Early Rosenwald school plan for a one teacher school, likely drafted by Robert Robinson Taylor or a pupil of Tuskegee’s Industrial Department. *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community*, 1915. Tuskegee Institute, pg. 12.
Each plan in *The Negro Rural School* offered a step-by-step guide for how to erect a school in the community: from site selection and situation to architectural stylings and construction material selection. Detailed blueprints could be purchased directly from the Extension Department at Tuskegee Institute for just $1.00, thus ensuring the plans were affordable to all rural Black communities.¹⁴⁷ The drawings consisted of floor plans, elevations, sections, and specification lists of necessary building materials. Health concerns like proper ventilation, sanitation, and lighting standards were also addressed in the pamphlet. East and west light was favored and building orientation was emphasized: “It is better to have proper lighting within the schoolroom, however, than to yield to the temptation to make a good show by having the long side face the road.”¹⁴⁸ The designs themselves were always modest, in keeping with Washington’s wishes to minimize costs.

Consequently, emphasis was placed on materials that could easily be acquired and constructed by local carpenters and community members, many of whom donated their time in lieu of monetary contributions. Some of these materials included lumber for clapboard siding, brick to build piers that school buildings would sit atop to aid in air circulation, double-hung six-over-six or nine-over-nine light windows for ventilation and optimal natural lighting, pitched tin roofs, and galvanized iron to build stoves for heating in the winter. Other features that typified Rosenwald schools were hipped and clipped-gable roof lines and central entrances with either a gable or shed porch roof. The plans in *The Negro Rural School* also included instructions for custom-made school furnishings such as benches and tables, as well as preferred vendor lists for school materials like blackboards and chalk. Proliferated by the one-room teacher plan that was predominant across rural southern landscapes, each of these elements quickly became character-defining architectural features of the rural Rosenwald schoolhouse typology that would continue with some later design additions throughout the entirety of program’s existence.¹⁴⁹

*Washington’s Death, Reorganization, and Establishing the Rosenwald Fund, 1915-1920*

On November 14, 1915, Booker T. Washington died unexpectedly after returning to Tuskegee from a business trip to the North. The educator had been suffering from Bright’s

---

¹⁴⁷ *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community*, (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute, 1915): 100-144.
¹⁴⁹ *The Negro Rural School*, 100-144; Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 56.
disease and kidney inflammation throughout the year.\textsuperscript{150} Washington’s rapid deterioration and subsequent death left the leadership of Tuskegee Institute and its rural school building partnership with Julius Rosenwald in question, but did not stop its momentum. At the time of Washington’s death, seventy-eight of the one hundred schools promised under Rosenwald’s $30,000 gift had been built in three states.\textsuperscript{151} The leadership at Tuskegee quickly reorganized and although Rosenwald did not support the Board of Trustee’s new choice for Principal, Robert Mussa Moton of Hampton Institute, he was confident in Calloway and the Tuskegee Extension Department’s ability to continue developing the rural school building program. In an effort to demonstrate his commitment beyond the initial partnership with Washington, Rosenwald bequeathed another $30,000 of funding for school grants and administrative assistance to help construct another one hundred schools in the program in February 1916. He again offered additional funding for up to three hundred schools only nine months later when “over 180 schools had been approved for assistance and Calloway estimated another hundred communities were organizing to apply for aid.”\textsuperscript{152} Rosenwald’s new pledge to the Extension Department’s building program energized the work at Tuskegee in the wake of its founder’s passing.

But over the course of the next four years, the Rosenwald school building program grew rapidly and suffered extensive growing pains as its scale increased. With new leadership under Moton, the program underwent several reorganizing efforts at Tuskegee. First, a Rosenwald committee of Tuskegee administrators was formed to handle correspondence with Rosenwald and Graves in Chicago. Their purpose was also to streamline the grant application process between the Tuskegee Institute and the growing number of state Negro and Rosenwald Agents throughout the region, a process that would remain unclear despite the aid of the Committee. Clinton J. Calloway, however, remained solely responsible for all major correspondence, field surveys, and final decisions pertaining to grant allocation through Tuskegee’s Extension Department. As a result, the Extension Department at Tuskegee became overwhelmed with applications and were becoming unable to keep up with the demand of the work, a problem that only compounded as the program expanded over the next few years.

\textsuperscript{151} Ascoli, \textit{Julius Rosenwald}, 151.
\textsuperscript{152} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 64-65.
Second, the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses” needed revision by the fall of 1917 to define and consolidate its operations as the program expanded beyond Alabama. The new version of the “Plan” created a more explicit process for application management at Tuskegee, tiered grant allocations based on school size (i.e., one-teacher schools received max $400, two-teacher schools $500, etc.), established the requirement that school construction needed to be complete with local monies before Rosenwald funding would be administered, and further extended school year terms with additional financial incentives. Rosenwald quickly approved the “Plan” revisions with the hope that the program’s new procedures would provide more structure to its growth.

The reorganizing efforts culminated in a new budget proposal for Rosenwald drafted by Morton, Calloway, and other Tuskegee administrators. It was their aspiration to build an additional three hundred schoolhouses in up to ten southern states on top of the three hundred already confirmed for construction. Along with a budget breakdown to cover costs for the new schools, the proposal included significant allotments to aid in restructuring the program’s administrative staff with the support of several new hires. In total, the proposed budget out of Tuskegee called for a prodigious $144,030. Rosenwald committed the funding to build the three hundred additional schools and a portion of the other requests, but the benefactor hesitated to donate all of the money, worried that the new “Plan” was not entirely sufficient in its ability to restructure the program’s operations.

Rosenwald’s reluctance reflected his changing sentiments at the time. He was now on the board of the Rockefeller Foundation and held close relationships with executives tied to the General Education Board (GEB). As a result, he became more exposed to the philanthropic efforts for Black education at the national level and was subsequently influenced by the work of his philanthropic peers. He was also persuaded by his secretary William C. Graves, who raised many questions about the management and bookkeeping abilities at Tuskegee. Rosenwald’s strained relationship with its new Principal Moton did not help ease his lack of trust the benefactor felt for Tuskegee’s abilities either. To address his growing skepticism, Rosenwald launched an audit in March 1919 to assess the Tuskegee’s management abilities and financial records dating back to 1913.\textsuperscript{153} The reported findings proved that significant reorganization would be necessary if the rural school building program was going to be successful moving

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 67-74; Ascoli, \textit{Julius Rosenwald}, 230-232.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
forward, even though worthy efforts had been made to stay organized at Tuskegee. As Graves reported to Principal Moton:

Kindly state to the Committee that the auditors seriously criticize the failure to keep books of account, the confusion in the files, the loss of valuable data, including checks, check stubs and expense accounts, the failure to reconcile bank balances, the temporary use of Rosenwald money for Jeanes fund disbursements and vice versa, and the payment of money to schools that had not made requisitions…The auditors believe the Fund was administered honestly, the conditions criticized being due to lack of knowledge of bookkeeping.154

Also of concern to Rosenwald was the physical quality of the schoolhouses themselves. Complaints from Alabama’s Negro State Agent James L. Sibley and other public school officials brought the lack of construction oversight to Rosenwald’s attention. Although plans from *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community* were widely circulated and blueprints available to communities for a low cost, many deviated from the plans in favor of cheaper construction materials more readily available on hand. The resulting product was often poorly built schoolhouses with inadequate windows, doors, walls, and other architectural features. Calloway and his staff simply did not have the bandwidth to monitor local building efforts to ensure the program’s standards were kept. As a result, Rosenwald hired Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar, a professor of hygiene and schoolhouse planning at George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, to survey the Rosenwald schools and report back on their conditions. His findings further verified Rosenwald’s speculations: that the lack of oversight on behalf of Calloway and Tuskegee’s school building program administrators had caused architectural deficiencies in the building methods that posed serious health and safety concerns.

Simultaneous to his investigative efforts at Tuskegee, Rosenwald had been undergoing his own reorganization of business endeavors in Chicago. On October 30, 1917, he established the Julius Rosenwald Fund (Fund), an independent philanthropic organization founded with an endowment of 20,000 shares in Sears, Roebuck, and Company. The Fund would serve as an umbrella for all of Rosenwald’s future contributions to various charitable causes, it’s philosophy embodying the slogan of betterment “for all mankind.”155 During the first ten years of the Fund’s operations, the organization remained under control of those close to Rosenwald: his wife, one of

---

his sons, and a son in law, with the philanthropist himself assuming the roles of President and Treasurer. Also assisting with administrative responsibilities for organization during this time were Francis W. Shepardson, who served as Secretary and Acting Director, and Alfred K. Stern, the Director. The two ran a small office in Chicago that assumed authority over Rosenwald’s future gifts, with the exception of the rural school building program still in Tuskegee’s control at the time.\textsuperscript{156}

But by 1920, it became obvious to Rosenwald that Morton, Calloway, and the administrators at Tuskegee would be unable to handle the volume of work required to successfully operate the rural school building program moving forward, despite insistence from the Tuskegee officials that with a better organized administrative team and more funding, it would be entirely possible. Disregarding the deeper racial message associated with moving the program away from Tuskegee and into the hands of a predominately White staff at the Fund, Rosenwald relied on his business acumen and made the official decision to do so in late April. Later that year, the rural school building program moved from Tuskegee to a new Rosenwald Fund satellite office in Nashville under new leadership. The building program had outgrown Tuskegee’s capacity to operate it, and the move signaled a shift toward attaining Rosenwald’s modern vision for a dynamic philanthropic campaign that would catapult Rosenwald schools into the foreground as models for public education in rural Black communities and beyond.\textsuperscript{157}

Although there are no complete records to accurately convey how many Rosenwald schools were built during the Tuskegee years, it is estimated that approximately five hundred rural schools were built in thirteen states between the program’s initial pilot phase in 1912 until its reorganization in 1920.\textsuperscript{158}

\textbf{The Later Years in Nashville: Tennessee Relocation and Reorganization of the Fund}

\textit{Rethinking the Rural School Building Program, 1920-1932}

Over the next twelve years, the rural school building program underwent major revisions under the administration of the Rosenwald Fund. The Nashville office became known as the Southern School Building Office, a move that defined Rosenwald’s school building program as


\textsuperscript{157} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 79-85.

\textsuperscript{158} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 48-52.
an independent entity separate from his other charities operating out of the Chicago office.\textsuperscript{159} The program’s reorganization under the Fund implemented a fundamental shift in its operations, as it became “increasingly distant from the communities it served and its staff increasingly white.” Historian Mary Hoffschwelle elaborates, “those changes would, ironically, allow the Julius Rosenwald Fund to develop into an aggressive philanthropy that would overshadow the school building program.”\textsuperscript{160} It was the schools built under the Rosenwald Fund during these years that would come to characterize the majority of Rosenwald schools built during the program’s tenure.

The overarching goal of the new program in Nashville was to establish networks of rural schools that resembled a proper public school system, akin to those in White communities and for both Black and White schools in urban areas. At Tuskegee, the school building program focused its efforts almost entirely on one and two teacher schoolhouses, which ultimately dotted the region in a disjointed fashion. The hope moving forward under the Rosenwald Fund was to create interconnected public school systems—rather than simply individual school buildings—in rural southern areas that served students at both the primary and secondary levels while still retaining the core industrial education curriculum that Washington had implemented and that remained popular in the context of the segregation that persisted in the Jim Crow Era.

Leading these efforts was former Tennessee Negro State Agent Samuel L. Smith. Smith, a White educator, was tapped by Rosenwald to head the Fund’s Nashville office after because of the new ideas and negotiating skills he brought to the table during Tuskegee’s restructuring phase in the years prior. Like Rosenwald and his colleagues, Smith envisioned a rural schools program whose campuses included grant funding for multiple academic structures, industrial buildings, and teacher’s cottages, as well as other important spaces like libraries and auditoriums. Smith steered the program in a direction that focused on the recommendations suggested by Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar during his 1919 study of the schools. Dresslar felt that a new set of architectural standards—one that focused on school hygiene rather than community social value—needed to be drafted. This would be necessary, by his account, to modernize the school


\textsuperscript{160} Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 85.
building program, preferably with a focus on the county training schools that were starting to become the contemporary standard for rural Black education beyond the primary level. This, he believed, would help consolidate public school systems into fewer campuses with better facilities instead of many smaller schools with poor facilities, a move in line with the new goals of the Fund. Additionally, Dresslar suggested more supervision was necessary to oversee construction laborers than local school superintendents and officials could provide.

To address these recommendations, Rosenwald and his colleagues drafted a new plan in the summer of 1920, titled the “Plan for the Distribution of Aid from the Julius Rosenwald Fund for Building Rural School Houses in the South” to replace the original “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses.” The document set a new framework for further operations of the rural school building program under the Rosenwald Fund. Although the new “Plan” was modified over the next decades, the two main objectives, consolidating the administrative structure and improving design standards and architecture to support industrial instruction, remained the program’s primary mission to advance the conditions of Black education in the rural South until its end in 1932.

The first goal focused on unifying Rosenwald school stakeholders under the leadership of each individual state. Despite the guidelines in earlier “Plan” drafts that mandated their involvement, the association between state agencies and local communities in rural school construction was unclear during the Tuskegee years, with no oversight from the Tuskegee administrators to ensure that collaborative relationships occurred. The Fund sought to change this, and their solution was to allocate grant funding not at the local level, but rather through state departments of education moving forward. While this move created a top down approach to its grant dispersion, it did not change the grassroots, self-help philosophy engrained within the school building program. Local Black communities, often with the help of White supporters, were still required to contribute an equal or even greater contribution than the Rosenwald Fund would provide. The requirement to contribute additional out of pocket donations on top of regular tax payments for public schools was of course not required of White communities for their schools, a stipulation of the Fund’s that often drew criticism and resentment from rural Black communities who challenged it’s obviously discriminatory nature. Yet many communities ultimately overlooked the stipulation, accepting the overarching benefit of erecting a local school for improved economic mobility. As such, Rosenwald, Smith, and their colleagues hoped that by
encouraging communities to build larger, more expensive schools with diverse facilities—a choice that would inevitably surpass the donation abilities of lesser income rural Black residents—would incentivize more financial involvement from public school agencies to absorb the schools into the public school system at the local level.  

In action, administering funds through the state department created a “high-pressure salesmanship campaign” because it sold the idea of Black education to both communities and now more rigorously to school officials. At the time, economic conditions resulting from poor agricultural harvests and social conditions caused by racism in the Jim Crow South had become so bad that many rural Black Americans moved northward, a phenomenon that became known as the Great Migration. The Progressive cause for Black education, which still operated squarely within the White supremacist system, recognized this new pattern of migration as an issue and doubled down on advertising to help keep Black citizens in the South. As a result, southern state agencies were very willing to appropriate public revenue toward Black education with the hope that better schools would entice Black agricultural workers to remain in the South, thus constraining them from escaping a life of sharecropping. During the 1920s, racial tensions remained high in the South with an emergence of the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups. The leaders of the Rosenwald Fund and the Fund’s various state agents knew they had to work even harder to ensure interracial cooperation at the local level to avoid attacks on Rosenwald schools. To avoid hostility, “Smith planned to administer the program with a common racial strategy,” Hoffschwelle writes, “employed by white reformers and philanthropic programs, a strategy that gave first priority to white expectations and adjusted plans for black education accordingly.” Consequently, their actions further ostracized Calloway and the program’s other Black founders at Tuskegee in favor of putting emphasis on the philanthropy’s new White paternalist leadership.

The second goal of the Fund’s operations in Nashville was to promote the idea of “better schools.” To them, “better schools” meant better architecture and better instruction, an advertising philosophy Smith, Dresslar, and their colleagues utilized to create what would eventually become model schools for rural southern education for both Black and White

communities alike. Rosenwald’s new “Plan” dealt with the design problems of Tuskegee era buildings, and created a provision stating that Rosenwald grants would only go toward new school building construction, not toward remodels to address faulty design flaws built under the previous administration (this provision would later be amended to allow funding for buildings destroyed in arson attacks and natural disasters). The new document also tiered funding to include additional grant money for larger schools with incentives for additional buildings and schools that operated on a minimum eight month term. Lastly, it required various steps of approval for school building construction, beginning with funding eligibility and later design plan as well as site and situation approval to ensure the Fund’s architectural standards were implemented in each project.165

In 1921, the Rosenwald Fund published its first iteration of *Community School Plans*, a pamphlet of design plans to be circulated throughout the South that focused on creating model schools of the 1920s. The document took on several additions throughout the decade as schools got bigger, but each plan type remained the same. The original *Community School Plans* incorporated and updated Robert Robinson Taylor’s original Tuskegee designs and added additional schemes designed by Dresslar for larger schools. The purpose of the new document was to create greater variation in the plans that focused more heavily on site and building orientation, ventilation and circulation, building sanitation, and longevity of materials. New plans were rectangular, “H,” or “T” shaped in form and required ancillary privies for students and teachers. Although brick and concrete became popular building materials to promote building longevity as the decade progressed and larger schools like high schools were built, many of the original character-defining features of the Tuskegee years remained: gabled roofs (although these had evolved from the original clipped-gable and hipped rooflines), porch overhangs, double hung windows, and clapboard siding among them.

Many schools still used self-made furniture reminiscent of the Tuskegee years instead of the prefabricated furniture listed in the new guidelines, which Smith subtly allowed knowing most communities could not afford to buy furniture from the Fund’s vendors. These materials had proven their worth as affordable and easy to access, and were comparable in quality to White schools without invoking jealousy as Booker T. Washington had warned in the early years of the rural school building program. Specific color schemes were developed to maintain continuity,

---

and by the end of the decade, model schools ranging from one to twelve classrooms had been built using the new Rosenwald school plans drafted in the *Community School Plans* pamphlet.¹⁶⁶ (Figure 2.3)

![Community School Plan 3](image)

**Figure 2.3**: Community School Plan 3. *Community School Plans*, rev. ed., 1928.

¹⁶⁶ Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 94-111.
In addition to architectural changes that addressed design issues, another goal of school modernization encompassed instructional standards within the architecture. The Rosenwald Fund continued to shift toward enforcing vocational and industrial training in its schools, a curriculum that was often cast aside during the Tuskegee years in small schoolhouses that only had the financial ability to teach basic elementary academics. To incentivize this, more grant funding was available for ancillary buildings and landscapes like vocational shops, kitchens and laundry rooms, agricultural fields, and community gardens. As the 1920s progressed, more funding tiers were added for larger schools with extra incentives for county training schools and high schools to support vocational equipment and materials. Along with plans for larger schools came more opportunities for communities to fund infrastructure that supported schools as the center of community life in the area. Spaces like auditoriums, cafeterias, and basketball courts were encouraged for school instruction, extracurricular activities, and athletics. Rural communities took advantage of these incentives, and by the end of the decade dozens of county training schools and high schools had been established throughout the South.167

Statewide financial support and updated architectural standards led the Rosenwald schools to become the model for Black schools as part of the Jim Crow Era’s Progressive educational reform agenda by the end of the 1920s. White communities saw improved Black schools as an opportunity to improve their own public schools, and many Community School Plans were approved for White schools in the South as well. The Fund subtly challenged the segregationist mentality of the Jim Crow Era in this way, with the Rosenwald schools having “created a visual vocabulary for southern rural schools that crossed the color line and suggested that all students could and should learn in professionally designed instructional environments.”168 With additional support for school transportation, library materials, and teacher’s salaries, the Rosenwald Fund had moved away from its original mission focusing on building rural school facilities, as established by Booker T. Washington, and successfully broadened its to create a network of public schools to modernize education for Black southerners. The Rosenwald schools built during the 1920s now complied with the standards for school construction at the national level, which brought the Fund nationwide recognition. Dedication to their school building facilities and Rosenwald’s continued support of Black education reflected in the Fund’s

167 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 111-124.
168 Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools, 113.
spending, with approximately eighty-five percent of its $4,049,974 expenditures consumed by the school building program in 1927.\(^{169}\)

But also in 1927, the direction of the Rosenwald Fund took a turn. Julius Rosenwald sought to reorganize it to operate as more of a charitable corporation than the personal benefactor model employed in the past. He believed that a “philanthropic foundation, in order to be a social agency rather than a personal convenience, had to have a policy-forming body consisting of members with a wide-range of interests and knowledge, who had no direct connection with the founder's fortune, and who could give all of their time to the work of the foundation.”\(^{170}\) That year, Rosenwald hired Edwin R. Embree, another White philanthropist and former Vice President of the Rockefeller Foundation, to lead the reorganization. As a result of Embree’s leadership, the Rosenwald Fund moved beyond building rural schools. Their focus was now on greater themes of social change, and Embree established new programs within the Fund to address economic issues in Black communities, specifically instructional programming, rather than facilities, within Black schools. Consequently, the Fund began to reduce grant funds for school buildings beginning in 1928. Embree believed that “our own rural school program has been well conceived and effectively carried out, but we can easily drift into the position of simply helping Southern communities do what from now on they should be ready to do for themselves.” To avoid devolution, he believed it was now time to take the focus away from school buildings and instead spotlight “what goes on inside of them” to address broader social issues regarding the construct of race.\(^{171}\)

Spurred by the Fund’s changing initiatives and fueled by the market crash in 1929, over the course of the next four years, Rosenwald grant funding for school construction gradually reduced based on schoolhouse size. The Rosenwald Fund’s rural school building program officially ended in 1932, after Julius Rosenwald’s death on January 6\(^{\text{th}}\). Over the course of its twenty-year tenure, the program saw massive growth from its original roots as a self-help initiative at Tuskegee under the guidance of Booker T. Washington. Ultimately, Rosenwald schools had spread as far west as Texas and Oklahoma and north into Maryland. The rural school

\(^{171}\) Rosenwald Fund Archives, Rosenwald Papers, “Special Confidential Memorandum on the Kinds of Things That Should be Supported by Foundations,” folder 6, box 58, series III, 23 July 1930; Rosenwald Fund Archives, Rosenwald Papers, Embree to Rosenwald, folder 9, box 33, series I, 4 May 1931, quoted in Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 155-156, 158.
building program ended with the Rosenwald Fund having “achieved the remarkable accomplishment of aiding the construction of over 5,000 schools in fifteen southern states,” which accounted for one-third of Black schools in the South at the time.\textsuperscript{172} (Figure 2.4) The Rosenwald Fund’s Southern Office closed in December 1937, and the Fund formally dissolved in 1948 after having supported other endeavors related to Black equality such as providing college scholarships and access to healthcare for southern Black Americans during its last few years of operation.\textsuperscript{173}

Figure 2.4: Map of Rosenwald schools, 1932. Courtesy of the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University.

**Rosenwald Fund Accomplishments in Tennessee**

By the time the school building program ended in 1932, the Rosenwald Fund had made significant contributions to Black education in rural Tennessee. During the Tuskegee years, Rosenwald school construction in Tennessee lagged behind those communities closer to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. So much so that in 1919, Clinton J. Calloway sent a somewhat


\textsuperscript{173} Woods, “Julius Rosenwald Fund,” 71.
threatening correspondence to then Negro State Agent Samuel L. Smith highlighting the state’s shortcomings in hopes of fueling Smith’s efforts to focus on constructing adequate rural schools.\textsuperscript{174} Tennessee’s inability to complete rural schoolhouses was not due to any lack of motivation on Smith’s part. In fact, he had already been working on ways to improve rural school design plans in Tennessee prior to his appointment to the Rosenwald Fund, when he was still a principal in the Clarksville School District and as the Negro State Agent in Tennessee.\textsuperscript{175} The state’s shortcomings were instead the fault of severe racialized tensions at the time. In some local communities, such as in Kingsport, White opponents used the legal system to stop the construction of a Rosenwald school for over five years. In many other cases, White men would steal tools and materials from construction sites overnight to halt construction. In 1917, Smith had already hired one of the first Rosenwald Agents, a Black educator named Robert E. Clay of Bristol, Tennessee, to help ease racialized group relations across rural counties to help get the schoolhouses built.\textsuperscript{176}

But once the program consolidated within the Rosenwald Fund under Smith’s leadership as administrator in 1920, Tennessee’s involvement in the rural school building program significantly increased and, to some degree, White hostility diminished. While the Fund’s relocation to Nashville distanced relationships with local communities in the deep South, this move actually worked in favor for its Tennessee relations, given that the Tennessee State Department of Education was also situated in the state’s capital. Smith applied the plans he had previously drafted with Dresslar to the 1921 \textit{Community School Plans} publication, most notably his H-Plan became a standard for county training schools, the first of which was the Fayette County Training School in Somerville, Tennessee, built under Smith’s direction in 1916. Around the same time, another training school was built in McKenzie, Carroll County with additional Slater Fund investment to support industrial education, which later became known as Webb High School.\textsuperscript{177} The first Tennessee Rosenwald school constructed after the 1920 reorganization was

\textsuperscript{174} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 66.
\textsuperscript{175} Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools}, 94.
\textsuperscript{177} Stitely, “Bridging the Gap,” 21-22.
the one-teacher Krisle School in Robertson County, which also utilized one of Smith’s original plans in the *Community School Plans* pamphlet.\textsuperscript{178}

But even as the Rosenwald Fund solidified its presence in Tennessee during the 1920s, it was met with opposition in several counties. After Smith was chosen to be Director of the Fund’s Nashville office and assumed responsibilities at the regional level, Robert E. Clay assumed the responsibility of local operations in Tennessee as the sole Rosenwald state agent, working closely with the new Negro State Agent of Tennessee, W.E. Turner. It was Clay’s task to rally communities in favor of building a Rosenwald school, and while he was successful in most counties, he did encounter significant resistance in Crockett, Carroll, Monroe, and McMinn Counties where rural Black communities had concerns about being “duped” by the White-led program when asked to provide their own funding and construction materials. Another challenge was convincing local Black ministers, who were widely recognized as community leaders, that school building would not be a threat to their control.\textsuperscript{179} Clay experienced even greater opposition in Tipton County, this time from White residents. When Clay asked the superintendent of Tipton County what he (Clay) could do to help consolidate the public school system, the superintendent told him to “get a hoe and chop cotton.”\textsuperscript{180}

Despite animosity and resistance that continued in both Black and White communities throughout the decade, Clay, under the tutelage of Smith and the greater Rosenwald Fund, was highly successful in persuading both Black and White rural residents that building Rosenwald schools was a worthy cause for rural Black education in Tennessee. To aid in his argument, Clay leaned heavily on the philosophy of Black self-worth and the importance of industrial training. By the time the rural school building program ended in 1932, Tennessee had built 354 schools, nine teachers’ homes on county training school campuses, and ten trade shops throughout the state. The Fund had provided $291,250 in aid, which was exceeded by Black communities in Tennessee that contributed $296,388 to the cause, with an additional $28,027 in donations from White supporters.\textsuperscript{181} But one school in particular, the Hardeman County Training School, later

\textsuperscript{178} Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 94.
\textsuperscript{179} Stitely, “Bridging the Gap,” 30-35.
known as the Allen-White School, would exceed all expectations set forth by the Rosenwald Fund.

Figure 2.5: Julius Rosenwald with students from a Rosenwald school, n.d. Courtesy of the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University.
Chapter 3. From a Building to a Plant: The Story of the Allen-White School Campus

The Hardeman County Context

The Rural Landscape of Whiteville, Hardeman County

In the southwest region of Tennessee sits Hardeman County (County), one of twenty-one counties in the West Tennessee region of the state. Its 668 square miles are bounded on the north by Madison and Haywood Counties, on the east by McNairy and Chester Counties, on the west by Fayette County, and on the south by the State of Mississippi. Bolivar, the county seat and largest town in Hardeman County, is located near its center, approximately sixty miles east of Memphis, the nearest metropolitan city. First organized in November of 1823, the County claimed its territory from the Jackson Purchase in 1818 when Tennessee Senator Andrew Jackson and ex-Kentucky governor Isaac Shelby purchased over three thousand acres of land, including that of West Tennessee, from the Chickasaw Nation through a series of treaties. Hardeman County was named after its first county clerk, Colonel Thomas Hardeman, a veteran of the War of 1812.

The County sits in the upper plateau of West Tennessee near the basin of the Hatchie River, which flows northwest and into the Mississippi River, and serves as the area’s primary waterway. The topography is hilly in the east and generally level in the central and western parts of the County. Its geographic proximity to the major trading market of Memphis, coupled with its fertile soil, consistent rainfall, and temperate climate, makes Hardeman County’s rural landscape conducive to an agricultural economy. As a result, early White settlers who came during the nineteenth century, most from southeastern states like Virginia and the Carolinas, capitalized on the opportunity to establish cotton plantations using the labor of enslaved peoples, thus bringing the first generation of Black Americans to the area. When the institution of

---

182 See Appendix A for a comprehensive timeline of education in Hardeman County and the Allen-White School.
183 Soon after the Jackson Purchase, in the years between 1837-1851, the Chickasaw were among several southwestern tribes forcibly removed from their native lands as a result of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, an event which became known in American history as the Trail of Tears. For more information about the Jackson Purchase and its effect on the Chickasaw Tribe, see: David Wesley Miller, *The Taking of American Indian Lands in the Southeast: a History of Territorial Cessions and Forced Relocation, 1607-1840* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011).
slavery was abolished after the Civil War, Hardeman County’s former plantation owners and freed Black Americans quickly transitioned into the sharecropping system that began to emerge across the South at the time. Cotton remained the primary crop, with Hardeman County becoming known as one of the better cotton producing counties in West Tennessee by the latter half of the 1800s. However, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the area began to shift away from a mono-crop system, a move that was solidified with New Deal funding. No longer reliant on cotton, Hardeman County continued as an agricultural stronghold and diversified its plantings to include significant harvests of grain, legumes, various types of berries, and okra, as well as livestock, to serve the consumer market throughout the Depression years. After World War II, the County followed broader postwar patterns of development in the United States and shifted toward an industrial economy, mainly focused on automotive and textile production.\textsuperscript{187} The 1930 census indicates that 8,532 of the County’s 23,193 residents were Black, equaling about 36.8%. By 1940, Hardeman County had grown to a total of 23,590 residents with a total Black population of 8,816, or 37.4%, due in part to the opportunities bolstered by New Deal programs established during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{188}

The Town of Whiteville (Town) sits in District Two at the northwest corner of Hardeman County and has historically been the second largest town in population after Bolivar. First established in the early 1800s by Dr. John White of Virginia, the settlement was originally used as a trading post for economic relations with local Native tribes. Dr. White’s Whiteville Trading Post, aptly named after himself, was located at the east end of the modern Whiteville street called Norment’s Lane and was one of the earliest known settlements in Hardeman County. Other inhabitants began to arrive after the 1818 Jackson Purchase and settled along the banks of nearby Clear Creek. A stage line stopped at the settlement as early as 1821, and by the 1830s, Whiteville had grown into a prospering young town with many municipal and social establishments, including a post office, school, several stores, a hotel, a saloon, and a blacksmith’s shop. Another early resident, John S. Norment (after whom Norment’s Lane is named), established the first and only cloth manufacturing factory near Whiteville in the late nineteenth century, which brought industrial work to the county during the years of the American Industrial Revolution. By 1900,


\textsuperscript{188} Rivers, “The History of Allen-White,” 5-6.
the residents of Whiteville had established a community supported newspaper called *The Whiteville News.*

The Town continued to expand after the turn of the twentieth century, with the population growing from 1,572 residents in 1870 to 3,634 residents by 1940. Although most original Black residents of Whiteville were brought to the Town as enslaved persons, many stayed after emancipation and worked as sharecroppers. By the 1930s, several Black professionals were living and working in Whiteville. Among them were Fred Tisdale who owned a dry-cleaning business, Thomas Green who operated a general store and soda fountain, Clay Crowder and T.H. Nichols who co-owned the first shoe shop in town, an attorney named P.L. Allen, another unnamed attorney, J.D. Williams, the town’s first jeweler, an unnamed merry-go-round business owner, and Dr. Gilbert Shelton, a Black physician whose office was located downtown near the post office. Dr. Shelton’s father was Anderson Shelton, a member of the Tennessee legislation. The Black population of Whiteville continued to grow throughout the twentieth century and Black residents make up a majority of the town today.

*Early Education and Public School Law, 1823-1900*

As Hardeman County developed, so too did the need for institutions of education. In 1823, the first schools in the County were established, serving White students of the new settler population only. Edwin Crawford and Henry Thompson are credited as the first schoolteachers in the County. But before there was a public school system, there were “academies,” which operated with monies from a common school fund the state received as payment for the sale of land, lotteries, and tuition fees. Many of the individually recognized charter schools also sequestered funding from wealthy local residents, teachers, and community organizations throughout the County. In 1831, Hardeman County appointed a school committee to create school districts of “convenient size.” The next year, the 1834 state constitution revision generally espoused the idea of education as a free public good. But despite these legislative advances, Hardeman was among the many rural Tennessee counties where residents were unable

---

190 U.S. Census Bureau, Table 3, Population of Civil Divisions Less Than Counties, Tennessee, 1850-1870, 264; U.S. Census Bureau, Table 4, Population of Counties by Minor Civil Divisions 1920-1940, 1019.
191 Hardeman County Historical Commission, *Historic Sketches*; Robertson, *Education*, x.
to come to a consensus on whether or not local schools would be a valuable use of tax revenue. As a result, no public school system was created in Hardeman County for four more decades. Instead, several academies for White students were established between 1826-1877, including Bolivar Male Academy (1830), Bolivar Female Academy (1832), Lafayette Male and Female Academy, Enon Academy, New Castle Female Institute, and Middleburg Male and Female Academy, J.F. Collins School, Jefferson Academy (1877), and the Whiteville Institute for Boys and Girls (1875).  

Simultaneously, few education opportunities existed for enslaved persons in Hardeman County. Although it is likely that some plantation owners allowed their enslaved population to be educated, there are no known accounts of schools that served Black students in the prior to the Civil War. Toward the end of the War, however, the County played a significant role in helping to establish educational opportunities for newly freed enslaved persons. In 1862, plantation owners in West Tennessee abandoned their land as Union troops seized territory across the state after several regional victories. Under a directive from General Ulysses S. Grant, Captain John Eaton Jr., a chaplain and former superintendent of the 27th Ohio Infantry, was sent to Grand Junction in Hardeman County in November to organize and manage the first “contraband” refugee camp for formerly enslaved persons. Freed persons from across the Mississippi Valley congregated at Grand Junction, about twenty-three miles from Whiteville, to receive aid from the Union Army. It was here that the first federally operated school for freed Americans was established to provide primary school instruction as well as skills-based industrial and domestic training. With help from the Western Freedman’s Aid Commission, northern teachers—both Black and White—came to Grand Junction to help operate the school. This phenomenon established a pattern across the greater southern landscape, which soon developed into the

---

193 There is no evidence that two of the schools were ever in operation at all, despite having been chartered by the state legislature as corporations and having boards of trustees. These include Middleburg Male and Female Academies Enon Academy. Robertson, Education, 1-2; Hardeman County Historical Commission, Historic Sketches; Mary S. Hoffschwelle, “Public Education in Tennessee,” Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans’ Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity. Middle Tennessee State University, 2014.

freedmen’s schools when the Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen’s Bureau) was founded as the War came to an end.195

After the Civil War ended, Hardeman County operated several Black schools through the Freedmen’s Bureau. Bolivar, the county seat, was the center for Bureau activity and became the headquarters for a Bureau sub-district in September 1868 that served formerly enslaved peoples from Hardeman and nearby Carroll, McNairy, Hardin, Decatur, Henderson, and Madison Counties. As a result, a freedmen’s school operated from 1867-1869 at one of the oldest Masonic Lodges in West Tennessee for Black citizens, the Bolivar United Sons and Daughters of Charity Lodge Hall. The school was taught by Charles Martin, and the Bureau had allocated $300 for the construction of a school building, although this never came to fruition. Other Bureau schools were established throughout the County, including a small school at Grand Junction in 1867, Pleasant Grove school at Saulsbury in 1868 taught by L.S. Frost, and another small school at Pocahontas in 1868 taught by W.S. Holly, a White teacher who fled his post for a new position in McNairy County after being harassed by the Ku Klux Klan. He wrote, “I was born and brought up in the South. Just because I was loyal to the [United States] government and fought in the Federal Army I must be run over by these scoundrels.”196 But despite initial success, each of the freedmen’s schools in Hardeman County closed by 1868 as northern interest in reconstructing the South began to diminish.

As Tennessee reintegrated into the Union, a series of public school laws codified the public right to education for Tennesseans in the state’s legislation.197 The most important of these was the 1867 Public School Law, which required county civil districts to establish special schools for Black children when the official population exceeded twenty-five potential students to ensure Black students were given “a common school education.”198 Under the same law, Captain John Eaton Jr. was appointed to the role of State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The 1873 Tennessee Parent Act codified that public schools should be free for all children.

197 For a detailed analysis of the legislation pertaining to education in Tennessee at the time, see Chapter 1 of this project.
residing within the school district, and created a segregated school system. In Hardeman County, it took seven more years to create a public school system, in part due to a continued disagreement over tax allocations, and additional hostility from White, property-owning taxpayers who either denounced Black education or felt it was not their duty to fund Black schools, especially since the majority of the County’s Black population did not own land.\footnote{Rivers, “The History of Allen-White,” 15-17.}

In 1874, a public school system was finally established in the County mandating elementary education for students in grades one through eight, with taxes later levied for secondary high school level education in an 1891 countywide provision. This move signaled a shift from the chartered academies to consolidated schools.\footnote{Robertson, Education, 2.} An 1887 report from the Hardeman County Superintendent showed that “there are now two brick, sixty frame and thirty-three log schoolhouses in the county. Of the scholastic population 4,595 are white and 3,968 are colored. Eighty-two white teachers are employed and forty-six colored.”\footnote{The Godspeed Histories of Fayette & Hardeman Counties of Tennessee, 1887 (Columbia, TN: Woodward & Stinson Printing Company, 1973), 61.} Enrollment continued to climb through the decade, and by the turn of the century Black elementary schools were in operation all over Hardeman County with support from county funds. By 1899, Hardeman County had established two high schools, but neither served Black students.

But even with expanded opportunities for Black education as a result of the recent Tennessee legislation, the new laws did not mandate an equal allocation of funding between Black and White schools, and supervision from county courts varied on a county-by-county basis in West Tennessee. In Hardeman County, taxes were not liberally appropriated to the public school system, which led to short terms and underfunded facilities for both racialized groups.\footnote{Kirskey, “History and Comparative Growth,” 7-8.} This, coupled with the system of White supremacy that dominated the Jim Crow Era, meant that rural Black elementary schools suffered especially. As a result, many of the new rural Black public schools in Hardeman County operated as one-room schools in churches, vacant houses, brush arbors, and Masonic lodges with term lengths of only about three to five months to ensure the children of sharecroppers could tend to the harvest in the spring and fall. It was not uncommon for one teacher to instruct up to one hundred pupils ranging from first through eighth grades in these makeshift one-room school facilities. According to local historian Alfreeda Lake
McKinney, school equipment at Black schools consisted merely of “a register, a water bucket, a dipper, a broom, a few erasers, and a box of chalk.” Textbooks were rare but sometimes received second hand from surrounding White schools, and because chalkboards were too expensive, a wall in the room was typically painted black to suffice. Furthermore, transportation, fuel for the furnace, and janitorial services were not provided for rural Black schools. Students and teachers would arrive early to build fires so the building would be adequately heated throughout the day. In reality, the early public schools for Black students in Hardeman County were not much different from those established in prior years by the Freedmen’s Bureau.

Establishing Black Public Education in Whiteville

*Jesse C. Allen and The School for Colored Children, 1905-1917*

One such school that was not afforded the benefit of a schoolhouse facility was Jesse C. Allen’s School for Colored Children (School). Founded in 1905, it was likely the only elementary school for Black students to exist in the Town of Whiteville between 1867-1920. The School operated out of the Whiteville Masonic Lodge, which was associated with the Prince Hall branch of Freemasonry established for Black Americans in 1784. The “shanty school”—as it was later described by the Rosenwald Fund—was held for a five month term each year, and classes were taught by two teachers: Mr. Jesse C. Allen and Mr. Dupree. The son of former enslaved persons, Jesse Christopher Allen graduated from Roger Williams University in Nashville in 1884. After graduating, he taught in various rural Black schools across West Tennessee for twenty-five dollars per month until he married his wife, Ada Neely, and settled in Hardeman County. There, Allen became a teacher in a small elementary school outside of Whiteville, which was relocated within the Town’s boundaries in 1905 and became the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children under Allen’s principalship.

---

204 No evidence was found to suggest that there was ever another elementary school for Black children in Whiteville during this time. After the passing of the public school law in 1867, there is no record of any Black schools at all in Whiteville until Jesse C. Allen’s School for Colored Children was established in 1905. The school was absorbed into the Hardeman County Training School in 1920 and later became the Allen-White School, which will be discussed later in this chapter.
In its first year of operation, the School enrolled one hundred pupils from the Whiteville Black community. Enrollment doubled just one year later, prompting Allen to hire two more teachers: Ms. Lena Owens from Memphis, and Ms. Mattie Tatum Fentress of Chicago.\(^{207}\) Enrollment remained steady, but in 1910 the Whiteville Lodge building burned down due to unknown circumstances, arson being the likeliest cause given the sentiment toward Black education in the growing Town of Whiteville. The building was rebuilt that same year, and classes for the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children resumed on the first floor in the newly constructed facility.\(^{208}\) By 1917, it became evident that the School had outgrown its makeshift classroom at the Lodge and required better facilities to function efficiently as enrollment and term lengths continued to increase. The desire to expand school curriculum beyond the primary level to include both liberal arts and industrial training was growing too. Consequently, the Black community in rural Whiteville began to organize efforts for a new school site after almost fifteen years in operation at the overcrowded Whiteville Lodge.\(^{209}\)

**A New Campus Vision and the Push for an Industrial School, 1917-1920**

The support for industrial schools, also known as county training schools, was embraced by state officials and private philanthropies alike in the second decade of the twentieth century. Both entities saw industrial training as a potential resolution to increase the poor literacy rates in southerners, especially in the Black population. Sticking within the context of Jim Crow, White Progressives and bureaucrats felt an industrial education was the answer to increasing Black educational opportunities. The initiatives enacted by both government officials and Progressive reformers “accepted a separate and unequal curriculum for black public schools that emphasized training for manual labor and domestic service,” as historian Mary Hoffschwelle explains. The emergence of this philosophy played a pivotal role in the successful timing of the Whiteville community’s campaign for financing a new school facility, given the proposed nature of the industrial school curriculum. As was the case with this community in Hardeman County, “black Tennesseans and their white allies used these programs as leverage for increased spending on black schools and then shifted the focus to improving academics.”\(^{210}\)

---

\(^{208}\) “Story of the Allen-White School,” Rosenwald Fund Archives.  
In 1909, new education legislation was enacted by the Tennessee State Assembly, which consolidated vocational education with the regular public school curriculum by providing state funding for industrial education in two-year high schools across the state. The legislation essentially incentivized public schools’ boards to provide industrial training to Black and lesser income White students at the high school level. By 1914, Hardeman County had embraced the new legislation, but only for White schools. Among the high schools established was Whiteville High School, which served the greater Whiteville population. That year, the County formalized the Hardeman County Board of Education and established eight public high schools in each district for the 1914-1915 schoolyear, all of which catered to White pupils. Although statewide support for expanding Black education via industrial education was present, with no attempt from local public officials to advance opportunities for Black education in Hardeman County beyond the primary level, the Whiteville community knew they needed to find support for their new school infrastructure elsewhere.211

Simultaneously, philanthropic organizations like the Julius Rosenwald Fund, established in 1917, were working to help finance rural Black school building efforts. Stemming from private sector capitalist attitudes, their work brought a sense of credibility to the cause among White southerners and government bureaucrats as the segregationist mentality grew across Tennessee and the greater American South. At the same time the Whiteville community was organizing, the Rosenwald Fund was about to begin the process of transitioning from Tuskegee to Nashville under the new leadership of former Negro State Agent Samuel L. Smith. Smith was highly influential in the Fund’s shift away from primary level liberal arts and classical courses and toward vocational and home economics training in rural Black schools, writing that each school should be a “beacon of light” for the local community, “…a blazing torch…to guide the pathway to better educational opportunities,” taking it upon himself “to see to it that every new Negro school was a model demonstration.”212 Under his leadership, which officially began in 1920, the Fund started to decrease grant funding for primary schools in order to fund larger county training schools instead. County training schools had already begun appearing throughout


West Tennessee by the late 1910s, including the neighboring Fayette County Training School in Somerville, Haywood County Training School in Brownsville, Madison County Training School in Denmark, and the Shelby County Training School in Woodstock. The enthusiasm of state officials and philanthropic donors to expand industrial training in Tennessee created the perfect financing opportunity for the ongoing efforts to establish a county training school in Whiteville.213

In 1917, Jesse C. Allen and local Black doctor Gilbert Shelton travelled to the Tuskegee Institute to learn more about the Rosenwald-funded rural school building program. They hoped to secure funding to build a new school facility, one that had the potential to grow into a campus plant that served students through the high school years. Upon their return, the organizers contacted Negro State Agent Smith to encourage a visit to Whiteville. Between 1917-1918, Smith, along with Tennessee Rosenwald Agent Robert E. Clay and Dr. George Washington Carver of Tuskegee, visited Whiteville to assess the project’s feasibility and to educate locals about the protocol for grant funding provided by the newly established Rosenwald Fund. Allen and Shelton knew that to acquire Rosenwald funding, the community would first have to attain local funds to cover construction costs, a provision outlined in the school building program’s 1917 revision to the “Plan for Erection of Rural Schoolhouses.” As a result, in 1919, a Board of Trustees was established to control the grassroots fundraising campaign in Whiteville for what would soon become the Hardeman County Training School (HCTS). Board members included Jesse C. Allen, Founder; William M. Murphy, Chairman; Dr. Gilbert Shelton, Secretary; Crawford Robertson, Treasurer; Isam Miller, J.N. Norment, Ed Crisp Sr., John Wilson Sr., Henry McKinney, Jim Reynolds, S.W.J. Allen, and Frank Beard. Operating under the continued principalship of Jesse C. Allen, the campus would serve elementary students formerly of the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children, and eventually high school students who would receive industrial training as well.214

Next, the Board of Trustees approached the Hardeman County Board of Education (Board) with the Rosenwald school proposal to secure additional financing and operational support from public school officials, another provision of the Rosenwald Fund to guarantee a

grant. The Trustees promised the Board that any necessary funds to match the Rosenwald grant for a school building would come from the local Black community, if the Board would purchase the required three acres of land on which to construct the building per the Rosenwald Fund requirements. The Board was likely convinced by an additional offer from local Black farmer and business owner Clay Crowder, who offered to donate to the County one-fourth acre of land if they would purchase the three-acre school site from him. The Board accepted the offer, and the transaction was finalized on March 13, 1919. The terms of the deed were as follows:

This indenture, made and entered into the 13th day of March 1919, by and between Clay Crowder and wife, May Fannie Crowder of the County of Hardeman, and the State of Tennessee, parties of the first part, and Dr. J.D. Sasser, Dr. Siler, C.M. Hunt, Blake White, and W.B. Baker, comprising the Elementary Board of Education of Hardeman County, Tennessee, parties of the second part.

Witnesseth, that the said parties of the first part in consideration of the sum of three hundred twenty-five dollars, of which two hundred fifty dollars in cash in hand paid, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, and the balance, said parties of the first part hereby donate to the County Training School, Whiteville, Tennessee. Do hereby grant, bargain, sell and convey unto said parties of the second part, their successors in office forever, the following described tract, lot or parcel of land in Hardeman County Tennessee...Containing three and one-fourth acres more or less. This instrument was filed for record October 17, 1919 at 10:45 A.M. and noted in note book 16, page 52.

J.W. Jacobs, R.H.C.

After reaching an agreement with the Hardeman County Board of Education, the Trustees secured a $4,000 joint note from the Whiteville Savings Bank to cover initial construction costs for a school building on September 17, 1919. The Black community of Whiteville’s fervent agitation to erect a school building in town had proven successful, and construction could now commence.

The Hardeman County Training School Years: Building a Rosenwald School

Dorris Hall, the First Brick Rosenwald School in Tennessee, 1920

The new Rosenwald school building in Whiteville gave Samuel L. Smith the opportunity to utilize plans he had been developing since his tenure as a principal in the Clarksville School

District. It also gave him another tangible opportunity to make an argument in favor of building county training schools with Rosenwald Funding in the sharecropping region of West Tennessee, a move that likely helped secure his leadership as Director of the Rosenwald Fund’s Southern Office the following year. Smith, along with Calvin McKissack of Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal School for Negroes (Tennessee A&I, now Tennessee State University), prepared a schoolhouse plan to help the Whiteville community avoid additional architecture fees. 218 By October 1919 construction on the new HCTS building was underway, one year prior to Smith’s appointment to the Rosenwald Fund and the subsequent publication of the 1921 Community School Plans pamphlet, a project headed by Smith and his colleague Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar. As a result, when the Whiteville community school was under construction, only basic architectural standards were available from the school building program’s original school design plans published in The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community, the 1915 project headed by architect Robert Robinson Taylor at Tuskegee. The Fund had not yet begun publicizing its modern building school program for “ideal schools,” which would soon include plans for rural schools ranging from one to twelve classrooms. 219

Smith was directly involved with the design and construction of the Hardeman County Training School around the same as time he was developing plans for the upcoming expanded Rosenwald rural school building program in Nashville. Because of this, it is very likely that the HCTS in Whiteville was the first county training school with Rosenwald funding to embody an “H” shaped plan that Smith and Dresslar would soon introduce to the Rosenwald program for larger schools. The “H” shaped plans for ideal modern schoolhouses were first published in the 1921 version of Community School Plans, which included plans 4-A, 5-A, 5-B, and 6-A, the latter of which is identical to the overall form and massing of the HCTS. Smith adopted the “H” plan from turn-of-the-century urban schools, where many classrooms were often forced to fit on small school parcels, yet still provide windows for each classroom per local building codes. Within the school building program, rural community school “H” plan designs ranged from four to twelve classrooms and included vocational training rooms and sometimes an auditorium, library, and office spaces, dependent upon the school’s size and the budgetary constraints of the

local community and school board. Optimal lighting and ventilation were of the utmost importance to Smith, Dresslar, and the Fund, therefore schools in the “H” plan form were required to face north or south.²²⁰ (Figure 3.1)

Figure 3.1: Rosenwald Fund 6-A Plan for a “Six Teacher Community School,” which depicts the H-shape form. *Community School Plans*, rev. ed., 1928.

Despite the general design standards that were in development within the Rosenwald Fund’s new and improved rural school building program, local communities often expanded the

²²⁰ Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 103.
initial floor plans to express agency and local pride.\textsuperscript{221} The plan for the HCTS directly mirrored that of the 6-A Plan later depicted in the 1921 publication. However, locals in Whiteville did take liberties with building materials, a recurring pattern among Rosenwald communities that soon became a problem for the Fund. Whether it was to differentiate a school’s architecture to reflect the community that built it, or the result of frugality among rural farmers responsible for funding their own community schools, design inconsistencies nonetheless led to subpar health standards or architectural impracticalities that Dresslar discovered in his 1917 survey of early Rosenwald schools. This phenomenon ultimately contributed to the demise of the Tuskegee operations in favor of standardization practices that would be better monitored by the Nashville office.\textsuperscript{222}

To cut down on construction costs, the community in Whiteville utilized brick masonry siding under the direction of a contractor by the name of Mr. Fields from Nashville with the construction labor assistance of local volunteers and vocational students from Tennessee A&I.\textsuperscript{223} At the time of the HCTS’s construction, brick had only been recommended by the rural school program pamphlet at Tuskegee for usage in foundation piers and chimneys, not as exterior siding. Instead, the recommendation was clapboard or board and batten siding, constructed of wood materials that Washington, Calloway, and Taylor felt would be easier for rural Black communities to mill and construct.\textsuperscript{224}

In Whiteville, however, the choice to use brick carried a different connotation than had other communities’ choices to deviate from Rosenwald standards in other parts of the South. Instead of creating poor conditions resulting from insufficient construction materials, the organizers of the HCTS had actually improved the building’s long-term architectural efficiency. In fact, by choosing brick, the Whiteville community had chosen a siding material typical of White and urban schools, one that had been purposely omitted from Tuskegee’s original design guidelines because of Booker T. Washington’s concern that well-built rural Black schools may put sharecropping communities at risk of arson and other fearmongering crimes if local White residents became jealous and resentful of the public school infrastructure for Black students built


\textsuperscript{222} For more information about this survey and its effect on the Rosenwald Fund school building program, see Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{223} Robertson, \textit{Education}, 12; Stitely, “Bridging the Gap,” 24.

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community}, (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute, 1915): 25, 27, 91.
with Rosenwald monies. But as Rosenwald schools saw success and interracial tensions eased over the course of the 1920s, the option for brick masonry siding eventually found its way into later revisions of the Fund’s *Community School Plans* publications. Perhaps unknowingly, the Whiteville community had broken the mold of the traditional Rosenwald school architectural aesthetic by creating a better schoolhouse building, making it highly likely the “first brick Rosenwald building in the South,” and certainly the first in Tennessee.  

   The original brick building was completed in the fall of 1920 and named Dorris Hall after Dr. Edmund H. Dorris, Chairman of the Hardeman County School Board at the time of the building’s erection. It was the HCTS campus’s only building for the first twelve years. The building was sited in a predominately Black residential neighborhood of Whiteville on the three allotted acres. The Elcanaan Baptist Church, which shared a close social relationship with the School over the years and now owns the campus today, was situated directly to the School’s south. Surrounding the campus were residences on the north, east, and west. (Figure 3.2) The 1920 design for Dorris Hall embodied the architectural standards of the Rosenwald Fund later depicted in the 6-A plan: its front façade faced south with three classrooms situated on each of the east and west “H”-shaped wings for a total of six classrooms, with additional facilities including an auditorium, library, cloakrooms, and a principal’s office at the center of the building. The building sat on a concrete foundation with a metal gable and hipped roof. The front of the building, the southernmost façade, consisted of a symmetrical central section with seven bays. The central entrance was flanked by three windows with three sets of symmetrically placed small rectangular fixed four pane lights at the cornice. On either side of the central entrance were three two-over-two light windows. There were also additional wood doors near the point where the central section met the gabled-end wings of the roof. On the east wing of the front façade, a stone dedication marker was placed that includes names of the original HCTS Board of Trustees, installed c. 1928. (Figure 3.3)

---

226 Dorris Hall is no longer fully intact, the cause of which will be discussed in Chapter 4.
Figure 3.2: The Hardeman County Training School footprint depicted on a March 1930 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives.
A concrete porch with two square wood posts once supported a flat roof. The north elevation, which was the rear of the school, had projecting brick gable wings like the front façade. A metal shed roof porch supported by metal and wood posts covered a central entrance of a double leaf door, which had a transom above. There were two sets of three windows flanking either side of the rear central entrance, with two additional window openings in the projecting brick wings. At the time of construction, the east and west elevations were almost identical, both consisting of three large bays, one for each classroom, composed of six banks of nine-over-nine double-hung sash windows, typical of the Rosenwald school design standards. (Figure 3.4, Figure 3.5)
Figure 3.4: Photograph of Dorris Hall building, ca. March 1921, photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor, view northwest. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 91, box 30, item 10561.

Figure 3.5: Photograph of the recently completed Dorris Hall building, ca. 1920s, photographer unknown, view northeast. Courtesy of the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University.
In January 1920, when it was clear that school construction would be a success, the Rosenwald Fund contributed the promised grant funding to the Whiteville community. The locals had raised their own allotment of funding, including a pledge of $100 per month by prolific local Black farmer Crawford Robertson, and had successfully petitioned the Hardeman County Board of Education for the land and cooperation to build a Black school. Because the Rosenwald Fund did not match dollar-for-dollar contributions but rather gave grants based on the size of school buildings, only $1,600 in funding was appropriated to the school building efforts in Whiteville, the max amount offered for a six-room county training schools per the Fund’s new “Plan for Distribution of Aid.” As historian Carroll Van West writes, “the funding for the school represented a significant investment by local African American residents.” In addition to the grant provided by the Rosenwald Fund, “local white residents provided an additional $1,600 and $2,000 came from public coffers. The rest of the cost—$9,000—came from the local African American community.” The staggering $14,200 total raised for the new school building was “the largest single amount raised in the state of Tennessee by African Americans for the construction of a Rosenwald school,” even exceeding the total funding raised by Black community members in nearby Memphis for Manassas High School, “the largest Rosenwald school constructed in the state.”

Students began attending school at Dorris Hall in February of 1920 shortly after the Rosenwald Fund awarded the grant funding, at least seven months before construction was fully complete on the building. For the first spring term, the staff included Principal Allen and three assisting teachers: Sarah Stockall of Nashville, H.G. Norment, who was the daughter of Principal Allen, and G.A. Shelton, the wife of Dr. Gilbert Shelton. It was at this time that the School was official renamed from Jesse C. Allen’s School for Colored Children to the Hardeman County Training School. The new building housed the elementary department and the home

---

231 Robertson, Education, 12.
economics department. The classrooms in Dorris Hall served as traditional primary level academic spaces, with students in grades one through eight. The teachers likely taught students across various grades and multiple subjects, including science, mathematics, reading, and English. Included in the industrial curriculum were home economics classes for girls. An additional room for the growing home economics department was added to the building in the following decade. It is also possible that the building was home to the nursery established on campus in 1934, which is said to have been the second nursery in Tennessee located on the campus of a county training school. The nursery was part of the elementary department and functioned as what would now be considered a pre-school. At some point before 1950, the library was also remodeled to accommodate the larger student body. Dorris Hall housed all aspects of HCTS’s administration department, and chapel was held during school hours in the building as well, likely in the auditorium or a separate chapel space. The auditorium was also used for school assemblies, social gatherings, and fundraising events during the 1920s.

Later in the 1930s and ‘40s, the auditorium became a space used for school clubs and organizations at the high school level, including the school band and choir singers. However, it also remained a space for community social and fundraising events—the nucleus of the school community. Dorris Hall’s library remained a fixture on campus until a new library space was constructed in 1948. Although the original brick building eventually fell out of use as the School’s campus outgrew its facilities by the late 1960s, various administrative, storage, and office spaces remained operational in Dorris Hall until the School’s final closure in 1974. The HCTS community’s grassroots effort to build the new Dorris Hall building had proven a worthy cause for construction, and the brick Rosenwald building remained a functional campus facility for almost sixty years.

*Early Principals and Fundraising Problems, 1920-1928*

Not unlike the rural school program’s co-founder Booker T. Washington, Principal Jesse C. Allen did not live to see his dream of a rural school in Whiteville completely realized. He died unexpectedly in August 1920, just before Dorris Hall was completed for the fall term. In shock,

---

the Whiteville community grieved the loss of their education pioneer. “He was a commanding presence when he stood before us…” said former HCTS student and teacher Myrtle Robertson in a 1995 interview, “…he was one of the educational leaders of that time.”234 The devastated Whiteville community immediately began the search for a new Principal to replace Mr. Allen, hoping to find a strong leader that could grow Allen’s vision for the new school in its first full-year term.

On the recommendation of Samuel L. Smith and the Tennessee State Board of Education, Luther L. Campbell of Knoxville, Tennessee soon filled the position. A graduate of Knoxville College, Campbell had taken courses in agricultural and industrial education at Tennessee A&I. According to historian Jerry Wayne Woods, “initially, Campbell’s credentials and personal attributes impressed the Board as well as the local citizens, who felt that he was capable of guiding the school to achieve its desired goals and purposes.”235 But Campbell’s tenure lasted only two years. In 1922, the new Principal resigned due to an “inability to work harmoniously with the faculty and Board of Trustees representing the Negro patrons,” perhaps resulting from “his apparent inability to control his temper.”236 The Board of Trustees had tasked Campbell to organize fundraising efforts within Whiteville’s Black community to help repay the $4,000 construction loan from the Whiteville Savings Bank, perhaps too monumental a task for the new Principal on top of his responsibility to run the HCTS’s first successful year long term.

According to local historian Evelyn C. Robertson, Principal Campbell made little effort to chip away at the loan repayment by “influenc[ing] the people not to pay the pledges that they had made, and [leaving] the burden of the interest on the original $4,000 on the shoulders of the Trustees.”237 His resulting departure seemed to be a mutually agreed upon decision by both Campbell and the Trustees.

But despite Campbell’s failure to appease the Board, he must be partially credited for the initial success of the HCTS in its first two years of operation. In 1921, during Campbell’s stint as Principal, the School was included in a report prepared by Saulsbury, Hardeman County native Wickliffe Rose for the Rockefeller funded General Education Board (GEB). Rose’s findings

---

237 Robertson, Education, 12.
exemplified the demand for rural schoolhouses in West Tennessee, and their inherent monetary and social value to the public school system. During its 1920-1921 school term, Rose found that the HCTS occupied 3.5 acres and had begun cultivating half-an-acre for agricultural purposes. The School had employed five total teachers for a nine-month school term (two additional hires from the short spring term prior to Principal Allen’s death), and taught a total of 303 students, an increase of 99 students since the year prior. Sixteen of the students were listed as having taken classes above the seventh grade, likely because most students left after elementary school to work in the fields with their families.

According to Rose’s report, the Dorris Hall building was valued at $15,000, its school equipment at $500, and $350 for the School’s land. By 1921, the HCTS had obtained an additional $900 in funding from the GEB, $250 of which was to be allocated to the Home Economics Department and $500 for industrial shop equipment. $150 of the donation was used to purchase blackboards with a matching $150 from the local community. Additional public funds for the School totaled $3,100 and other sources totaled $2,191, including a promised grant donation of between $300-$400 from the Slater Fund each year in the early 1920s, a philanthropic organization whose focus was on county training schools such as the one in Whiteville. It is unclear whether Campbell or the Trustees were responsible for acquiring the additional funding during the School’s first two years in operation, but its presence in Whiteville was certainly gaining recognition as a premier facility for industrial education for Black students in West Tennessee.

Even with public attention, it required consistent effort and a steady relationship between the Trustees and the HCTS Principal to encourage local Black residents to contribute funds to help repay the $4,000 mortgage needed to keep Dorris Hall in operation throughout the decade. Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington had implemented a challenge grant structure to the rural school building program, a one-time allocation that was not meant as a recurring endowment for any single school. Because of Washington and the Fund’s mutual philanthropic philosophy of self-help and determination, the Whiteville community had to come up with the

---

money to repay the loan themselves. The Board found a new leader in George W. Thomas of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Thomas took on the principalship at the HCTS after graduating from Roger Williams University in Nashville. Despite his likable character, Thomas soon found himself in a similar position to that of Campbell, having “showed an inadequacy in connection with the problem of raising funds with which to repay the loan made by the Trustee Board.”

Reluctant to dismiss Thomas prematurely, the Trustees—led by Dr. Shelton—petitioned the Hardeman County Board of Education to help the Black community in Whiteville find a new principal that “could unify the community behind the school program,” with the hope that “a person possessing the tact of Professor Allen,” as he was referred by the HCTS community, “might be appointed.” Throughout the 1920s, Principal Thomas did have some success repaying the School’s loan, having reduced the payment by $500 in 1923 and $400 in 1924. His efforts quickly lapsed, and school funding efforts remained slow for the next several years. The initial donations dried up and Dorris Hall suffered deferred maintenance as the decade progressed. The HCTS community barely had enough money to continue the School as the Depression approached, and a few dedicated farmers mortgaged their farms or even sold them in their determination to keep the School going.

In the summer of 1928, Principal Thomas gave notice of his resignation after losing the support of the community during his six-year span as Principal, which resulted in sunken morale and doubt over HCTS’s future. If they were going to uplift the School out of its financial debt and into a new era of expansion, Whiteville’s residents needed a new visionary.

James H. White and a New Approach, 1928-1930

Shortly before resigning, Principal George Thomas met a young man named James Herbert White on a train from West Tennessee to Nashville. Thomas told White about the Hardeman County Training School and the difficulty he and his predecessor Principal Campbell had experienced resulting from the School’s ongoing financial burden. White offered suggestions for ways to raise money that would help liquidate the School’s debt with public support from

---

242 Robertson interview, 2022.
both Black and White residents. Principal Thomas remarked, “Do you realize that you are the very man who should go to Whiteville? You are the man for the job. I feel you could help the people there a great deal if you would accept it.” Principal Thomas took his proposal back to the HCTS Board of Trustees, who then offered White the principalship on the additional recommendation of new Negro State Agent Ollie H. Bernard who had succeeded Samuel L. Smith in 1920 following Smith’s promotion to the Rosenwald Fund.

White was the grandson of two former enslaved persons and the child of two illiterate parents, born in Gallatin, Tennessee. He graduated from Tennessee A&I University in 1924. After completing his studies in agriculture and industrial training, the young academic became the Assistant Principal at Montgomery High School in Lexington, Tennessee. Determined to exceed the societal boundaries placed on southern Black men in the early twentieth century, White told his mother as a young boy, “…don’t you worry about me. You just keep on helping me all you can. Some day I’ll make you proud of me. I’ll be a college president before I’m forty years old.” Seeing no option but success, White replaced Thomas as HCTS’s new Principal in September 1928. He spent his first few summers in New York obtaining a master’s degree from Columbia University to bolster his teaching credibility in Whiteville. The Hardeman County community had finally fulfilled their longing for a leader like founder Jesse C. Allen, one that would be steadfast in his effort to grow the school into a successful regional plant.

Principal White and his wife Augusta arrived in Whiteville that fall to a “dilapidated, run-down shell of a building” with almost $5,000 in outstanding interest costs on the construction loan from a decade prior. His own observation of the conditions in Hardeman County reflects the situation of many rural Black Rosenwald communities in West Tennessee at the time, many of which were struggling from the subjugation of sharecropping, low cotton prices, and resulting economic hardships:

…the community was hostile, race relations were poor, the country was on the brink of the Great Depression, and the concern for education was at a low ebb. The only positive aspects of the job were a challenge and a fertile field for hard labor.

---

Dorris Hall had no electricity or indoor toilets when Principal White arrived, and the School was in desperate need of repairs. According to his memoir *Up From A Cotton Patch: J.H. White and the Development of Mississippi Valley State College*, despite the economic circumstances and obvious lack of morale, “Dr. White did not want the citizens to believe that he was discouraged just because they were discouraged themselves.” The new Principal immediately went to work organizing a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for the HCTS with the desire to build stronger community relations in Whiteville to rally support for the School.

Along with the parents and community leaders that comprised the PTA, White quickly organized HCTS’s first fundraiser. The event took place on Thanksgiving Day in 1928, just two months after he became Principal. Thanksgiving coincided with the harvest season in West Tennessee when rural farming families likely had some extra income to donate to the cause for education in Whiteville. The PTA set a goal of $1,000 for the drive, which was surpassed by the community’s donation of $1,179 at the conclusion of the day’s events. Principal White’s efforts gained more support after the Thanksgiving rally, and the campaign was repeated the following year for a total of $3,128 raised by the community in 1929. With additional funding from the Board of Trustees to reach the $4,000 loan amount plus interest, the HCTS had raised enough money to pay back its mortgage in only one year of Principal White’s tenure. To celebrate, the Whiteville community held a mortgage burning ceremony at the conclusion of the 1929 Thanksgiving Day drive with special guests Katherine Ingram, the Hardeman County School System’s Superintendent, and Dudley Tanner, then Negro State Agent for Tennessee. (Figure 3.6) This act signified that the decade of debt was finally at an end for the Hardeman County Training School.

---

The first two Thanksgiving rallies were such a success that the campaign became an annual event at the School for the next several decades, growing over the years to include programmatic events like pie struts, box supper competitions, community picnics, a minstrel and comedy show, and a banquet, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Each year, members of the Board of Trustees and PTA were assigned an area in Hardeman County to solicit pledges. At the time, the HCTS was one of only two industrial training schools in the County that served Black students at the primary level, the other being Bolivar Industrial, which also taught students through eighth grade in the county seat. Consequently, the School’s leaders knew that Black residents in surrounding parts of the County would be interested in their fundraising campaign because they also would benefit from an expanded school campus that would provide opportunities for students who lived in rural communities beyond the Town of Whiteville.

When November came, solicitors would travel to their assigned territories, talk to both Black and White residents about the mission of the HCTS, and then report their pledges at the rally. Those who pledged contributions included rural wage earners such as sawmill and domestic workers, farm owners and tenants, and members of church congregations and lodges. Many pledged monetary donations with their small surplus of harvest income, but some also
donated their time in labor or materials for future construction projects. Some agriculture workers planted extra cotton or raised hogs to sell on behalf of the School, and others cut trees for lumber or even donated small sections of land surrounding the School’s campus. By organizing community members into competitive committees for the annual rally, Professor White, a nickname given that was reminiscent of his predecessor, was able to incentivize fundraising efforts and boost morale for school building aspirations at the HCTS, thus proving that Booker T. Washington and the Rosenwald Fund’s ethos of self-determination worked in local communities with good leadership and grassroots organization. In the 1929-1930 school year, the PTA raised $5,172.44 and continued to raise large donations for school improvement from the Thanksgiving drive each year thereafter.²⁵⁰

To incentivize local communities participating in the rural school building program, the Rosenwald Fund also created its own annual fundraising event called Rosenwald Day. In a December 1930 memo to the Fund headquarters in Chicago, Nashville Director Samuel L. Smith concluded there was a need to beautify and improve Rosenwald schools across the South, especially as the effects of the 1929 market crash took hold in the region. Smith declared March 6th to be Rosenwald Day, and outlined a framework for its success, which included Rosenwald funding for promotional marketing materials to be distributed to participating communities, prizes for state education departments that grossed the highest amount of donations, and additional prizes for specific schools based on the upkeep of Rosenwald building features like properly hung windows and a protected drinking supply. A highly publicized event, the intention of Rosenwald Day was not only to drive donations from Black communities at the statewide level, but to “refocus these events from the community and its school to the Rosenwald building program and its place in the philanthropic pantheon for southern black education.”²⁵¹

A June 1932 report revealed that Tennessee led fundraising efforts for Rosenwald Day that March, and the HCTS had ranked sixth place in the state for gross donations from White contributors of the 343 schools surveyed. This finding indicates that racialized hostility had eased and support for the county training school in Whiteville was growing. This shift likely

resulted from Principal James H. White’s ability to work across racialized groups and appeal to White attitudes regarding Black education to acquire financial support in Hardeman County during the Jim Crow Era, much like the building program’s co-founder Booker T. Washington had done during his years at Tuskegee. The Hardeman County Training School did participate in Rosenwald Day each year, however because of their own success with the Thanksgiving rally, the School did not need the small allocation offered by the Fund for printing materials to publicize the Rosenwald School Day event locally. Their own grassroots fundraising efforts had proven to be more successful with the Black community in Hardeman County than even that of the greater Rosenwald Fund. However, the School did accept a few smaller donations from the Fund in the 1930-1931 school year, including a $40 donation for elementary library materials, $100 for vocational equipment, and a $500 construction loan for an industrial shop on campus, a building incentive the Fund had phased in during its 1920 reorganization to promote the construction of larger regional county training schools.252

With the monies obtained from the Thanksgiving drive, Rosenwald Day, and additional grants from the Fund, the PTA and Trustees immediately began allocating revenue for needed campus improvements, additional staff, and new school facilities. Since 1928, Principal White had added three more teachers to the School roster, including his wife Augusta C. White and teachers L.E. Fitzgerald and J.C. Adams. In 1929, he added a fourth teacher to direct the band, Mr. Lockert. In the same year, Principal White also used funding to establish a new school paper called the *Hardeman County Mirror*, knowing that a school paper would help keep the community informed of the happenings and fundraising events at the HCTS, and could help raise money itself with advertising revenue from local businesses.253 Later in 1929, the new Principal asked Superintendent Ingram to pay for a new roof for Dorris Hall with public revenue from the Hardeman County School Board. His petition was successful, and the roof was fixed. By the end of 1929, running water had been added to Dorris Hall as well.

But what the building needed most was electricity, and Principal White struggled to overcome racialized hostility in the effort to bring power to the school. He approached West

---


253 Robertson, *Education*, 16.
Tennessee Electric and Power Company Association headquartered in Jackson, Tennessee to provide power for Dorris Hall, which was situated three-quarters of a mile from their Whiteville location. White had already secured labor from local farmers who agreed to furnish eighteen thirty-five-foot chestnut poles “to meet the company’s specifications in order to bring electricity to the school.” The company’s officials refused, citing that “they could not bring lights that far for a Negro school.” To remedy the situation, Principal White requested a meeting with the Commissioner of Utilities in Nashville, who then heard his case in front of the Utilities Committee. “After [I] described the community, the school, and [my] plans for helping to build a good community and school,” White wrote in his memoir, “the commissioner promised to investigate the situation. He later ruled that if the utility company did not bring the lights to Hardeman County Training School, it would have to give up the franchise in Whiteville.” The 1929-1930 school year began with students and faculty using gas lamps, and by Christmas the West Tennessee Electric and Power Company Association’s Whiteville location had installed the new electric lights.254 When asked about Principal White’s tenacity in a 1994 interview, former student and Hardeman County historian Alfreeda Lake McKinney quipped “he knew where the big plums were and he know how to shake the trees.”255

In his short time as the School’s new leader, Principal White had proven himself an ambitious visionary committed to accomplishing the goals for the HCTS originally set forth by Jesse C. Allen. By 1930, Dorris Hall had been repaired and updated to fit the modern standards of education required by the Rosenwald Fund. With additional hires, the faculty was now equipped to handle more students in higher grade levels across various subjects. Principal White’s fervent dedication and successful fundraising tactics, coupled with the bootstrap ethos that had permeated into the community by Washington and the Rosenwald Fund, created the foundation on which the HCTS could now expand into a successful county school plant that would function as the anchor to the Whiteville community and serve students from first grade through high school.

The Allen-White School Years: Growing an Industrial School Plant

Renaming the School, The NYA Program, and Campus Expansion, 1930-1948

Recently freed of their financial burden and now able to afford new school facilities, Principal White, the Trustees, and the PTA were finally ready to extend the HCTS campus beyond Dorris Hall and above the eighth grade. In September 1930, W.E. Turner, State Director of Negro Education in Tennessee, visited the School and contributed input for its future development. The community wanted to build additional academic and industrial facilities on donated land around the campus and needed support from public officials like Turner to obtain high school accreditation. A new Public School Law had passed in Tennessee in 1925, which unified all schools enacted since the 1873 advent of the segregated public school system in the state. The legislation encouraged county boards to establish and maintain junior and senior high schools where the need was present, regardless of racialized status. In Hardeman County, the law was met with support from both Black and White communities who would benefit from new high school facilities. Most White residents were indifferent toward the idea of creating high schools for Black students in the County. Although the inequity and segregationist attitude driven by White supremacy during the Jim Crow years persisted, rural White farmers, the demographic most often responsible for hostility toward Black communities in West Tennessee, were preoccupied with the devastating losses of income and plunging property values that had ensued in the early years of the Great Depression. As a result, the provisions of the Public School Law and the current economic climate created the right conditions for the HCTS to obtain the social support it needed expand.256

In 1930, the HCTS became one of only two Black schools in Hardeman County accredited to teach students two years of a public high school education. The following year, the Hardeman County Board of Education voted to rename the School. It was now to be called the Allen-White School for elementary and junior high, with Allen-White High School serving grades nine and ten. Allen-White (AW; School) was named after the HCTS’s founder and first principal Jesse C. Allen, as well as the current principal and “maker” of the School’s success, James H. White. By the start of the 1931-1932 school term, two more grades had been added to AW for a total of four years of accredited high school education that accepted students from surrounding communities.

who came to Whiteville to attend the School. The HCTS met the state’s requirements for high school curriculum: four units in English, one in mathematics, one in health education, three in a major (i.e. agriculture, trade, home economics), two each in two minors, and two electives. Principal White hired teachers with “sound educational training and philosophies congruent with the school’s aim” from reputable colleges and universities across the country. AW was now a functioning consolidated public school and the first Black school in Hardeman County to teach grades one through twelve for Hardeman County residents. It would remain the only Black high school to offer the four full years of high school education until 1959. AW’s first graduating class of thirteen students graduated in the spring of 1933, ten of which went on to attend college.257

The additional grades added at AW reflect a broader pattern of school development that took place over the 1930s, which was heavily influenced by philanthropic participation of the Rosenwald Fund and other ancillary foundations. In his 1928 “Report on Negro Schools,” Samuel L. Smith wrote:

…serious effort is now being made in the states to increase the number of accredited Negro high schools, using the same standard by which the white high schools are rated. This accelerated high school process has been due to (1) the development of the rural school building program in which thousands are induced to remain through the elementary grades, (2) the influence of the Slater Fund and the General Education Board in developing county training schools, (3) the policy of the school officials for better trained teachers, and (4) the great desire of the Negroes themselves to give their children the best possible educational facilities even at much sacrifice.

In the same study, Smith indicated that Tennessee ranked second among southern states for its number of teachers employed in a rural Black school, falling only behind Louisiana. He also indicated that the average term length of Rosenwald schools was around 6.5 months, with Tennessee conducting above average terms spanning about seven months in length.258 AW was no exception to the high standards set by Tennessee Rosenwald schools, and the county training school in Whiteville gained national recognition from state agents and philanthropic organizations as Professor White took his fundraising efforts beyond the local community during his twenty-year tenure as Principal, soliciting donations to hire additional staff and raise money

for new campus buildings. In addition to his position at AW, Principal White served as Hardeman County’s Jeanes Supervising Teacher until 1939, a position that helped broaden his network of benefactors as well. In 1933, Allen-White was part of a Rosenwald school exhibit in the Social Science Building at the Chicago World’s Fair Centennial Celebration. Because he was a member of the Fair’s Board of Trustees, Julius Rosenwald likely used his position to leverage a display that touted his work with the Rosenwald Fund’s school building program, especially its more recent success establishing public high schools and county training schools for Black students across the South.259

But even with Principal White’s ability to bring in new benefactors and increase AW’s exposure, Tennessee’s public schools still suffered during the Depression years, and the poor economic conditions in West Tennessee threatened to divert financial support away from public education. The economic disaster led to New Deal federal programs bolstered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The challenge of the Great Depression, immediately followed by the urgent circumstances of World War II, encouraged Tennesseans to seek aid for their public schools that combined local and state revenue with additional federal funding offered by the government. Local leaders across the state lobbied the Tennessee General Assembly in the first half of the decade to protect public education in the state budget. Their efforts, along with emergency funding from the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), kept Tennessee schools in operation during the first few years of the Depression. In 1935, three New Deal agencies—the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA)—played a pivotal role in temporarily replacing the depleted budgets of Tennessee’s public schools by appropriating large sums of federal dollars into the public education infrastructure. The inequities of segregation persisted, however, and although Black schools received funding from New Deal programs, their allocations were often inadequate compared to White schools.260


By the mid-1930s, Allen-White was already in progress on new facilities for the county school plant. In addition to buildings that would support the expanded curriculum, Principal White and the school leaders focused their attention on constructing dormitories for students who came from other parts of Hardeman County to attend AW. At the time, students had to travel by wagon or by foot for miles to get to school because there was no public funding for bus transportation to Black schools in Hardeman County. With infrastructure to support student and teacher housing, AW would be able to retain a higher number of enrolled students and grow the teaching staff as needed. The expansion plans that were already in action made the training school in Whiteville an excellent candidate for a National Youth Administration (NYA) program, one of the three New Deal organizations that offered federal funding to Tennessee schools during the financial crisis. The organization worked to curb rising youth unemployment rates by creating work and education opportunities for American between the ages of 16-25. The NYA’s mission to provide vocational training with a learning-by-doing ethos coincided with that of the Rosenwald Fund and other philanthropies and state agencies that encouraged the same mentality at county training schools like AW. As a result, many county training schools across the South hosted NYA programs during the Depression years, and NYA students were often involved with Rosenwald school beautification programs like Rosenwald Day.261

An NYA program was established on Allen-White’s campus in the fall of 1936, likely the first resident NYA project in Tennessee, based on the School’s burgeoning reputation.262 The program initially consisted of forty-five boys who had previously left school and now returned with the New Deal financial support to complete their education while also earning a living wage by working at the School. Although they did participate in the agriculture department, most of the male NYA students took to the trade department where they were tasked with construction projects around the campus, learning skills like carpentry, brick masonry, and windowmaking. The program quickly expanded to include girls as well, all of whom participated in home

---


economics classes to learn various domestic trades while working in service jobs on campus to earn their wage. As the school plant grew, so did its enrollment. Allen-White served as a fully functioning boarding school from about 1932-1941, with an active NYA program from 1936 until 1941 when campus New Deal programs immediately ceased after the United States entered World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.263

AW attracted students interested in the work program, athletics, and co-curricular student activities from eleven Tennessee counties during these years, including forty-three students from Fayette County, twenty-eight from Haywood County, sixteen from Sumner County, twelve from Montgomery County, seven from Davidson County, four from Madison County, and one each from Obion, McNairy, Gibson, Crockett, and Shelby Counties, in addition to the majority of pupils from Hardeman County.264 In addition to those from Tennessee, other students boarded at the School to take part in the NYA program from neighboring states Mississippi, Arkansas, and Kentucky. The School’s success was coveted by the Whiteville community, as former student Minerva Jackson recounts, “they all wanted to be a part of Allen-White and the Whiteville community. Even folks in Bolivar, where the county seat was.”265

Ironically, it was during the years of the Great Depression and early war years that the Allen-White School saw its greatest success. Operations at AW mirrored institutions of higher education in the region such as the Tuskegee Institute, which gained a positive reputation for the students’ ability to create educational opportunities through industrial training that propelled Black economic mobility using Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of self-reliance in the context of the segregated Jim Crow South. Principal White had created the same environment in Whiteville, and by June 1940, AW had obtained an “A” letter Certificate of Honor from the Hardeman County Board of Education for meeting quality standards of education.266 The School had made a significant impact on the local Black community as well as White residents’ attitudes toward Black education, although still seen as inferior to White advancement at the time. According to a local reporter for the Hardeman County Times in 1943:

---

263 White, Up from a Cotton Patch, 25-27; Robertson, Education, 22.
The Allen-White High School is heard of in all sections of the country for the type of work done through its leader, J.H. White. This school is widely known for its community activities which sponsor progressive education in all its phases. The Education Policy Commission rated the school as one of the four leading schools in the United States in carrying out a program of citizenship. The relationship between the white people of the county and the school has been good. The school has served a great purpose and in times like these it is fine to have a school like Allen-White.  

With the help of the NYA program, Allen-White’s enrollment grew, student organizations flourished, and as a result of student labor, the campus grew to comprise of almost a dozen total buildings, including the original Dorris Hall six-room schoolhouse. Each of the School’s additional landscapes, structures, and buildings erected during the Great Depression and World War II years are described in the sections hereafter.

*Fields and Landscaping*

The fields surrounding Allen-White’s campus played an important role in the School’s agriculture curriculum and social activities, although little evidence remains to accurately site them on campus. It is assumed that any additional acreage of the three total acres given to the School by the Hardeman County Board of Education through the deal with Clay Crowder in 1919 not used for Dorris Hall was used to support the School’s agriculture department for male students, initially taught by teachers A.C. Williams and William Harris. Based on student accounts, the fields were located to the west, north, and northeast of the campus buildings. They consisted of plotted fields for agriculture, recreation fields, and, in later years, one area to the north of campus was developed into a baseball field with a track to support the baseball, cross country, and football teams.

By 1939, the agriculture department was using surrounding field plots to experiment with crop harvests, primarily corn and potatoes. Livestock such as cows, chickens, and hogs were also raised in the fields and sold locally to raise money for the School. Students of the agriculture department helped clean ditches, repair roads, trim lawns, and assist with plantings and harvest for neighboring farmers as well. AW’s fields were home to the School’s New Farmers of

---

268 See Figure 3.21 at the end of this chapter for a site plan of Allen-White’s campus during the height of its construction years, ca. 1930-1950. For more photographs of the buildings on the Allen-White campus, see Appendices E (historic photographs) and F (modern photographs).
Tennessee chapter and in some years served as the location for Hardeman County’s annual Field Day, an event that took place with participation from several Black schools in the County.\textsuperscript{269} A 1946 issue of the school paper—by then renamed the \textit{Allen-White Voice}—announced the call for donations to raise $10,000 from Whiteville residents to match a conditional grant for $17,000 offered by the General Education Board (GEB), $2,000 of which would be allocated toward the purchase of a sixty-five acre farm “adjoining the school.” The new land would be used to house “the cannery, hatchery, farm shop, and butchery.” It is unclear if the funds were ever raised by the community to secure GEB funding for the additional farmland, however classes in these areas of agriculture were still incorporated into the curriculum.\textsuperscript{270}

Closer to the School’s campus buildings was a truck garden and other subsidiary garden plots used by both the agriculture department and the home economics department. Boys helped grow the crops while girls in home economics classes used vegetable and herbs for cooking classes and learned to can and preserve foods from the garden for long-term kitchen storage.\textsuperscript{271} AW’s campus was minimally yet well landscaped, with various species of conifer trees, shrubs, and hedges throughout. The campus was enclosed by white x-crossed fencing, and each building was connected with concrete walkways that bisected grass lawns. At the campus’ main entry was a concrete circle walkway with a flagpole at its center.\textsuperscript{272} During the 1934-1935 school year, Allen-White won “most beautiful school in Hardeman County” as well as the “school making the most improvement” in the Rosenwald Fund’s first annual Improvement and Beautification of School Plants” contest, also known as the “Schoolground Improvement Competition.” In Tennessee, thirty-three counties and two hundred schools participated that year and were judged

\textsuperscript{269} Information here regarding the locations and functions of AW’s fields are based on various oral history interviews collected by photographer and historian Ann Smithwick in: Ann Smithwick, “Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders,” project materials, 2004-2007. Additional interviews to support these claims were conducted by the author with former Allen-White students including Evelyn C. Robertson, Odell Greene, Charles Johnson, Fredell Harris, Cosette Crawford, Ocie Holmes, George Dotson, and Johnny Shaw between October 13-14, 2022 in Whiteville, Tennessee. Each interviewee was asked to complete a memory map to help aid in the author’s understanding of the Allen-White campus layout. Additional information about the agriculture curriculum at AW was sourced from a report on four county training schools in the South during the Depression years: Dr. Fred McCuiston, “Learning the Ways of Democracy,” Educational Policies Commission Report, General Education Board, Washington D.C., 1943, 318-319.

\textsuperscript{270} “Our Present Needs,” \textit{The Allen-White Voice}, November 12, 1946, 3, James H. White Collection, Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{271} Smithwick, “Rosenwald Revisited” interviews, 2004-2006; Author, student interviews, 2022; “Democracy,” Educational Policies Commission, 1940.

\textsuperscript{272} Description of campus landscaping elements based on photographs from the Tennessee Department of Education Records 1874-1984, Record Group 273A, “Schoolhouse photos, 1938-1942,” boxes 2, 3, 8, various photographs, Tennessee State Archives, Nashville.
based on score card criterion including fencing, landscaping, grading and terracing, among other categories. It is likely that AW participated in the contest in the following years as well. By the School’s closure in 1974, much of the landscaping from the 1930s-1950s had been removed.273

Playgrounds and Parking Lot

In addition to recreational field spaces, Allen-White’s campus had several playground locations as well. During the 1930s-1940s, the playground was located in the lawn space near the School’s entrance, south of Dorris Hall and north of the neighboring Elcanaan Baptist Church. The original playground had at least two swing sets, two slides, a seesaw, and a concrete rink for skating.274 (Figure 3.7) In AW’s later years, another playground was built on the west side of what is now Jarrett Road, parallel to the campus with additional swing sets and slides. These spaces were primarily used by students at the elementary level. Junior high and high schoolers preferred to sit on the campus lawns or use the ball fields during recess.

Figure 3.7: “Playground equipment and skating rink” in front of Dorris Hall, photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor for the Jeanes Monthly Report, view west. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 273A, Schoolhouse Photos, 1938-1942, item number 8.

By 1933, the Allen-White campus had a parking lot near the entrance of the school on Allen-White Extension Avenue, west of the campus buildings and east of what is now Simmons Street. The paved lot was primarily used for transportation to and from school and as a recreation space because most of the School’s community members did not own a car.275 During the 1920s and 1930s Jim Crow years, there existed no publicly funded transportation system for Black students in Hardeman County as there had been for White students since public schools consolidated. Some students had to travel great distances to get to Allen-White from across the rural region and neighboring counties, and many could not afford to stay in the dorms. School leaders sought to remedy this issue by raising funds specifically for a bus line to and from the campus at the annual Thanksgiving rally. Their efforts were successful during the 1931-1932 drive, and by 1933 the PTA had purchased a bus to transport twenty students over sixty-five miles between Whiteville and Grand Junction for $1 per month. (Figure 3.8) A local named Johnny Robertson was the first bus driver. In 1934, the PTA raised enough money to purchase another bus for use by AW’s athletic teams, the traveling choral group and band, and for field trips.

In 1936, the County Board of Education made its first step toward aiding the Allen-White community with transportation services when the PTA found it financially impossible to continue operating the busses it had been supplying after community members were unwilling to undergo another round of self-taxation to support the unfair transportation system. To aid in the cause, a local Black resident of Bolivar named Austin Fentress purchased a bus and began transporting students over seventy-eight miles a day to AW’s campus. The Board assumed part of Fentress’ operating costs and paid him a monthly salary. In 1940, Hardeman County finally stepped in to assist Black public schools with transportation, and in 1943 the Board purchased the bus from Fentress and assumed control of the public school bus line to and from Allen-White. The two busses owned by the School were kept at AW’s parking lot, along with some cars owned by students, parents, and teachers in later years. Ultimately, it too the Hardeman County Board of education over thirty years to provide transportation for Black students since it had begun the public service for White public schools.276

275 Author, student interviews, 2022.
Ingram Hall, 1930

After ten years of fundraising, the first new building erected on Allen-White’s campus since Dorris Hall in 1920 was a dormitory for girls and teachers. The building was named Ingram Hall after Hardeman County’s former Superintendent Katherine Ingram, who had been an instrumental advocate for Black education in the County during the HCTS years. Completed in 1930, Ingram Hall was a two-story Colonial frame structure on a brick foundation with white clapboard siding and double hung six-over-six sash windows.277 (Figure 3.9, Figure 3.10) It was located about one hundred yards northwest of Dorris Hall. It consisted of fifteen double-bed dorm rooms to accommodate a total of thirty female students and teachers. Like others on in progress on campus, the building was constructed by students in the trade department at AW. Ingram Hall’s primary purpose was to board girls and teachers who came from other parts of the state and country to learn and teach. A few other spaces were included in its design, including a

---

small industrial shop for boys trade courses, but this room soon became another space for the Home Economics Department when a new shop was built on campus in the same year. The room was likely later used for meetings of the campus’ Future Homemakers of America club, the sister organization of the boys’ New Farmers of Tennessee club.

Ingram Hall included other amenities like shared bathrooms, and likely housed the campus’s first dining room. Fundraising for the building began during the first 1929-1930 Thanksgiving rally. The building cost between $4,000-$5,600, $2,500 of which was secured via loan by members of the Board of Trustees from the Whiteville Savings Bank. By 1932, the Whiteville community had raised an additional $800 in the Thanksgiving rally to pay back to the loan for the building.278 The building was demolished sometime in the mid-1940s or early 1950s.279 In 1995, former Allen-White faculty member Bernice Walker Williams reflected on her time living in Ingram Hall:

This was my first job right out of college; it was also my first time staying on a dormitory. The single teachers stayed on the girls’ dormitory with the young ladies and the married teachers had cottages. I had a roommate who was also a single teacher. We were both music teachers, so we always had something in common to talk about. Professor White’s mother was over the dormitory and she took care of the kitchen facilities and all of the people living on the dormitory came together to eat. The teachers ate at a special table. These were the single teachers, men and women. The dorm was fixed up quite sumptuously.280


Figure 3.9: Proposed design for Ingram Hall, based on Rosenwald designs for a teacher’s home, *Hardeman County Mirror*, 4. Courtesy of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Digital Collections.

Figure 3.10: “Front and side view, Teacher’s Home [Ingram Hall], Whiteville, TN, Hardeman County,” photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor for the Jeanes Monthly Report, view northeast. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 273A, Schoolhouse Photos, 1938-1942, item #33323.
Howse Hall, 1930

During the 1929-1930 school year, parents of the PTA petitioned the Hardeman County Board of Education to provide funding for a new academic building to support the overcrowded Dorris Hall as AW’s enrollment quickly increased. Led by President of the PTA James R. Neely, their efforts proved successful when the Board offered to provide building materials for construction of the new facility. The building was completed by trade student in the summer of 1930 and was located about one hundred yards northeast of Dorris Hall. It was named Howse Hall after C. Rosamond Howse, the District Commissioner of Education in Hardeman County. The new building was a three-room vocational building with brick cladding modeled on a Rosenwald Fund 2-room shop design published in a 1920s revision of the *Community School Plans* pamphlet. (Figure 3.11)

Figure 3.11: Proposed design for Howse Hall, based on Rosenwald designs for a two-room shop, *Hardeman County Mirror*, 4. Courtesy of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Digital Collections.

It was a one-story, wood frame structure on a brick foundation with white clapboard siding. The central entrance consisted of two nearly symmetrical wings, with one six-light door to access each wing on a single brick foundation accessed by three steps with a box gabled
roofline that was supported by wood brackets. The west wing of the building consisted of three grouped nine-over-nine light double hung sashed widows on the building’s front façade. To the west of the window grouping was a set of double doors that opened to the shop, each with three vertical panels and six window lights. Above the shop doors was a slight shed roofline. On Howse Hall’s eastern wing there was a grouping of five nine-over-nine light double hung sashed widows. The building’s secondary facades consisted of additional fixed and double hung wood sashed windows.281 (Figure 3.12)

Figure 3.12: “Vocational Building [Howse Hall], Hardeman Co. Training,” photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor for the Jeanes Monthly Report, October 1930, view northwest. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 273A, Schoolhouse Photos, 1938-1942, item #584.

Howse Hall housed the agricultural department in one room, the science department in another, and a new shop in the third room to replace the one in Ingram Hall for trade classes and equipment storage. The boys in the trade department, sometimes referred to as the manual training department, learned practical trades that aided their construction projects on campus under the direction of teachers William Woods, Bill Parham, and Dan Green. Students in this department also assisted Whiteville residents with pro bono construction work to support the

industrial curriculum, as long as the owner agreed to furnish the construction materials. In later years, Howse Hall also housed the history department as well. According to the May 1930 issue of the School’s *Hardeman County Mirror* publication, the building cost a total of $3,000 and included a “special room” in the shop “for the location of a forge where broken parts of farm tools may be repaired.” It is likely that the $500 construction loan for an industrial shop granted by the Rosenwald Fund one year prior contributed to the construction of Howse Hall. By 1933, Dorris Hall, Ingram Hall, and Howse Hall were all “joined by concert walks” on campus. Howse Hall was demolished sometime during the 1960s.

Principal’s Home, 1932

During their first few years in Whiteville, Principal White, his wife Augusta, and their children lived in a boarding house that was run by Whiteville resident Maggie Neely. The boarding house was situated only a few yards southeast of the School’s campus, across the street from the neighboring Elcanaan Baptist Church. With additional money from the construction budget in 1932, students of the trade department built Principal White and his family a one-story, five-room white frame bungalow in the modern Craftsman style. The residential building was located just northeast of the schools campus near AW’s agriculture fields. It had a cross gable-and-hipped roof and was clad in white clapboard and shingle siding. The front protruding bay consisted of a grouping of three twelve-over-twelve double hung sashed windows. The central entrance on the front façade was accessed by three stairs, above which existed a brick pier and a supporting white rectangular column. The roofline over the central entrance was a flat and projecting with exposed rafter tails, supported by exposed brackets. The Principal’s home was likely demolished sometime in the 1950s-1960s. (Figure 3.13)

---

283 *The Hardeman County Mirror*, May 1930, Hardeman County Training School, 4-5.
284 White, “Allen-White High School,” Author, student interviews, 2022
Clift Recreational Hall, 1934

In 1934, the PTA took total financial responsibility and paid for the erection of Clift Recreational Hall. The building was a one-story, wood-frame building with white clapboard siding on a concrete slab foundation. It was located in the northeast section of campus, north of Howse Hall and south of the agriculture and recreation fields. Its front façade consisted of three bays: one central bay flanked by two symmetrical wings on each of its east and west side. The central bay had three equally spaced six-over-six double hung sash windows and metal hip-and-gabled roof with exposed wood rafter tails. The two flanking bays mirrored one another, with a half-glass door with three panels and a metal shed portico supported by wood brackets that was accessible by concrete stairs. The flanking bays each had an additional six-over-six double hung sash window as well.286 (Figure 3.14)

The building was named after Mr. W.W. Clift, then-superintendent of Hardeman County Schools, however it is assumed the Recreational Hall consisted of meeting rooms to support local events consistent with the Rosenwald Fund’s ambition to create functioning community centers on county training school campuses in the South. Clift Recreational Hall probably hosted classes for the elective music department and its various co-curriculars, including the choir, school quartette, and teacher’s trio called “The White Sisters.” The department’s most popular organization was the minstrel club. It consisted of male and female students of all ages who participated in a variety show which included singing, acting, dancing, and comedy sketches. The show was called “The Allen-White Laugh and Minstrel Show,” and it became widely popular in Tennessee and adjacent states when AW’s students performed the show regionally to raise money for the School. The minstrel club was sponsored by teachers Augusta White and Eddye Maye Money during the 1930s and 1940s.287

It is also likely that Clift Recreation Hall housed the first gymnasium on Allen-White’s campus beginning in 1934. The School’s athletic department had been growing since the HCTS

\[287\] Robertson, *Education*, 18, 24-25, 57.
years in the 1920s and needed a better equipped space for physical education classes and athletic co-curriculars than the auditorium in Dorris Hall. The gymnasium was home to the wrestling, tumbling, and basketball teams, the latter of which quickly became the most popular sport on the School’s campus. AW’s 1938 men’s basketball team, coached by Principal White, won the National High School Basketball Tournament for Colored Students held in Tuskegee, Alabama. In the following years, the 1940 and 1941 girls’ basketball teams won the same tournament for two consecutive years. The trophies for these wins were placed in the library in Dorris Hall. A new gymnasium was constructed on campus in the late 1940s that served the high school teams until AW’s high school closed in 1970. Clift Recreation Hall was demolished sometime in the late 1940s.288

Sandwich Shop, 1934

In the same year, male students of the trade department constructed a small sandwich shop funded by the PTA. According to local historian and former student and principal Evelyn C. Robertson, the sandwich shop “was a two room eat shop where boys and girls ate lunch and where patrons visited after school hours for a soda and sandwich.” The small, wood-frame building resembled a shotgun style house and was situated on a concrete slab foundation. It was white with clapboard siding and a metal gabled roof. It’s front façade consisted of a four-glass wood door with a metal shed portico supported by wood brackets that was accessed by two concrete stairs. Two four-over-four double-hung sash windows flanked either side of the door. The sandwich shop was likely demolished in the early 1940s after the NYA program ended on campus.289 (Figure 3.15)

W.Y. Allen Hall, 1934

The PTA assumed financial responsibility for one more building in 1934: W.Y. Allen Hall, a dormitory building to house twenty-five “young men.” There exists no photographic or written evidence to describe W.Y Allen Hall, but it was likely named after a relative of the School’s founder, Jesse C. Allen, and comprised of wood-frame and clapboard siding indicative of the Rosenwald rural school building designs at the time. It is unclear where the building was sited on campus or when it was razed.²⁹⁰

NYA Dormitory, 1936

With funding from the National Youth Administration, students of the trade department built yet another dormitory in 1936. While Ingram Hall and W.Y. Allen Hall primarily housed students hailing from other parts of Hardeman County, the new dorm became home to students

²⁹⁰ The Hardeman County Mirror, May 1930, Hardeman County Training School, 2; Robertson, Education, 58; Woods, “Julius Rosenwald Fund,” 184.
of the NYA program as well as gifted athletes and music students who came to Whiteville from
other parts of Tennessee and neighboring states to attend Allen-White on a work-aid basis. Many
of the students stayed in the new dorm during the school week and returned home on the
weekends. According to a mental map drawn by former student Fredell Harris ’66, whose older
relatives attended AW during this time, the NYA dorm may have been located in the northeast
section of campus parallel to what is now Simmons Street, near the Principal’s home. It is
unclear when the building was demolished, but it was probably removed in the 1940s after the
NYA program on campus ended.291

The First Cheek Hall, 1940

By the mid-1930s, plans for another academic building to support the expanding high
school curriculum were underway. The proposed new building would house the growing home
 economics and trade departments, with the hope of becoming “the most complete training unit
for Domestic Services in the South.” The facility would hold indoor agriculture and health
classes as well. Besides classrooms, other spaces in the vocational building would include an
auditorium, a laundry, a basement, a heating plant, and a clinic for students to obtain primary
care and dental treatment.292 Efforts to raise the capital to build the new vocational facility began
in 1937. By this point, Principal White had made a name for himself and the Allen-White School
throughout the region, and his success in Whiteville attracted ongoing philanthropic backing
from various benefactors who supported the cause for Black industrial education in the state.
Among them was wealthy Nashville businessman John H. Cheek, a personal contact of Principal
White who had become a friend of the School. In the first months of 1938, Mr. Cheek donated
$3,000 for the community to purchase construction materials for the new building, to be called
Cheek Hall. By the Thanksgiving rally that year, the Black community of Whiteville and
surrounding areas had raised $2,500 to partially match Mr. Cheek’s gift.293 On March 10, 1938,
the PTA purchased two acres of adjoining land north of AW’s campus from Principal White to
serve as the location for the new building. The deed read as follows:

mental map exercise, October 14, 2022, Whiteville, Tennessee.
March 29, 1939, box 106, folder 4, microfilm, Record Group 273, Tennessee Department of Education Records
1874-1987, Tennessee State Archives, Nashville.
293 White, Up from a Cotton Patch, 26-27.
Know by all men present that for an in consideration of four hundred dollars cash in hand paid, the receipt is hereby acknowledged, J.H. White and wife Augusta White, parties of the first part do sell and convey the parcel of land bordered on the south by a plot owned by the Hardeman County Board of Education…Containing two acres more or less to Johnnie Norment, V.L. Robertson, Hulis Shaw, J.H. White, Ben Murphy, Hayes Reynolds, Bessie Walkton, Robert Motley, Johnny Robertson, Charlie Lewis, Ten Crowder, James R. Neely, Eddie Crisp, and Zebedee Cross as trustees of Cheek Hall Vocational Building, and not as individuals, and to their successors in trust. 294

W.B. Chase, a “lumberman of Detroit,” donated the doors and windows for the new vocational building, and by the spring of 1938, construction on Cheek Hall was underway with labor provided by the boys’ trade department and NYA students. 295

Little photographic evidence exists of the 1940 Cheek Hall building, and it is unclear where exactly the building was situated on the northernmost part of AW’s campus. However, a few construction photos shed light on the building’s design. (Figure 3.16, Figure 3.17) Cheek Hall’s overall form and massing was not indicative of any one specific Rosenwald school plan, but rather reflected the general Rosenwald style adapted to suit the Whiteville community’s needs. Like others on campus, it was a two-story Colonial wood-frame building with white clapboard siding on a concrete slab foundation. It consisted of three bays on its front façade with a central entrance flanked by two symmetrical wings on either side. The central entrance consisted of one arched entry on the first floor, likely to accommodate double doors, with a box gabled portico supported by square columns and an open gabled roof. The central entrance was accessible by stairs flanked by brick walls. There were two openings for double hung sash window on other side of the central entrance. The second story of the central bay was a continuous dormer consisting of six window openings with a shed roofline. Each of Cheek Hall’s east and west bays on the front façade consisted of one small window opening closest to the central bay, with four equally spaced window openings on its outside and an open gabled roof. 296

295 White, Up from a Cotton Patch, 26.
Figure 3.16: “Cheek Hall” under construction, photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor for the Jeanes Monthly Report, April 30, 1939, view likely north. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 273A, Schoolhouse Photos, 1938-1942.

Figure 3.17: “Cheek Hall” under construction, photographed by an unknown Jeanes Fund Supervisor for the Jeanes Monthly Report, April 30, 1939, view likely northwest. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Archives, Record Group 273A, Schoolhouse Photos, 1938-1942.
Principal White spent the next two years tirelessly searching for additional donations to equip the building with the needed faculty, industrial machinery, furnishings, and school supplies. Various correspondences between White and Tennessee Director of Negro Education W.E. Turner from 1935-1940 illustrate the exhaustive lengths to which Principal White dedicated himself to the School’s progress. In them, Principal White outlines his ongoing struggles with White community leaders and state agents in Hardeman County, and his inability to staff teachers and raise enough funds to complete Cheek Hall and other projects planned on campus. Seeking both emotional and tangible support from Turner, Principal White gave Turner his notice of resignation as the County’s Jeanes Fund Supervisor on December 12, 1939, indicating in the same letter his wishes to resign at Allen-White “at whatever time you deem necessary in order that the officials may have time to secure my successor.” Despite the mental toll of his leadership position, Principal White managed to secure the funding needed to outfit Cheek Hall in the closing months of 1939. It was his intention to leave the school at the conclusion of the spring 1940 term after having succeeded in growing AW’s physical campus plant to accommodate a high school curriculum during his ten-year tenure.297

On Monday, February 19, 1940, Cheek Hall burned down just one week before its scheduled dedication ceremony. Inside were the building’s remaining construction materials, including some windows and doors that still needed to be installed. The high school vocational building had not yet been insured but was valued between $25,000-$40,000. There was no formal investigation into the case by the Whiteville Police Department or Hardeman County Sheriff’s Office, although many residents of the Whiteville community believe the fire was caused by a racially motivated arson attack on the Allen-White School. The next evening, PTA President William Harris called an emergency meeting and plans to embark on a new construction project to replace the burned building immediately began. At the meeting, parents contributed $500 for the erection of a new building. The next day, Principal White placed a cement order with the money, and the trade department students began creating concrete blocks

for a new Cheek Hall the following week. The devastating setback did not deter the Allen-White community, but instead renewed their efforts and the dedication of Principal White, who vowed to put his resignation on hold until a new Cheek Hall building was constructed. He immediately began drafting letters to wealthy individuals, community organizations, and philanthropic funds as early as February 29, 1940, on letterhead paper titled “Cheek Hall Reconstruction Drive.”

Agnes Tierney Hall, Gilbert Hall, and the New Cheek Hall, 1947-1948

After Cheek Hall burned in February, Principal White informed Mr. Cheek of the fire, and “out of the heartbreak and tragedy, due to renewed effort and sacrifice, an additional gift from Mr. Cheek was given in the amount of $7,500.” But the community still needed to raise at least $25,000 to replace the vocational building, which became increasingly urgent as AW’s enrollment continued to grow. Consequently, White was granted a month’s leave from his duties as Principal by the Hardeman County Board of Education to travel and continue contacting individuals and foundations that had previously shown interest in the School. According to historian Ernest Rivers, “he carried pictures of the boys and girls at work in the school,” as well as “letters of recommendation and brochures” about AW on his travels throughout Tennessee and neighboring states. “With his ability to sell the program of the school to the public,” writes Rivers, “many visitors came to see the progress of the school in operation.”

During this time, Principal White sent many more letters to W.E. Turner describing the needs of the School and his ongoing struggle to obtain enough funding to rebuild Cheek Hall. White’s spirits were soon renewed in April 1940, when Turner coordinated a visit to Allen-White for the General Education Board’s (GEB) Dr. Fred McCuiston, who surveyed the campus as part of a study he was conducting on southern county training schools for the Education Policy Commission. With the help of Robert E. Clay, whose role as Tennessee’s Rosenwald Agent was to “politicize and organize local community enthusiasm” and to invoke “community pride” in the rural school building effort, Turner had provided Principal White with an opportunity to secure

---


more funding from the GEB for Cheek Hall and to motivate the community once again to donate for the cause of school construction.\textsuperscript{301}

On February 19, 1941—one year from the day Cheek Hall burned—Allen-White was visited by wealthy philanthropists of the GEB, including John D. Rockefeller III, Winthrop Aldrich, Jackson Davis, and William I. Meyers of Cornell University. The men had likely heard about the burgeoning campus from Dr. McCuiston’s survey report, which ranked AW as one of the four leading Black schools in the United States at the time. In 1995, former student Myrtle Robertson described her feelings of meeting John D. Rockefeller III:

Believe it or not, one of the Rockefellers, John D. [III], visited Allen-White School. He came here and people didn’t want to believe it. Yes, he came to our school because I spoke to him. It was a special occasion and we had dinner all of that. Just to look at him was something for us, just to see him. He didn’t stay very long but he came.

The civic leaders were impressed with what they saw at Allen-White and warranted it worthy of financial support. On the recommendation of Rockefeller and his colleagues, the GEB donated $7,500 to the Hardeman County Board of Education to purchase materials for further construction of the new Cheek Hall in 1942. With enough funds to obtain the necessary materials, the reconstruction project took off. Around the same time, the “Whiteville Rural Community Center, Inc.” was established to handle all future private contributions to the Allen-White School, and the PTA continued to raise funds at the annual Thanksgiving rally and other fundraising events held throughout the year.

As construction progressed in the first few years of the 1940s, the design scope of the Cheek Hall project changed significantly. An architect was hired, likely with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund, to draw plans for an expanded school building. (Figure 3.18) What was once a single, Colonial style building with multiple classrooms soon grew into a proposed project consisting of three separate yet adjoining institutional brick buildings for the high school: Agnes L. Tierney Hall, Gilbert Hall, and Cheek Hall, collectively referred to as “Cheek Hall” by the AW community.\textsuperscript{302} The choice to expand beyond the original Cheek Hall design paralleled that of other county training schools in the South, many of which were adopting modern design

standards that reflected the style of urban industrial high schools paid for by the Rosenwald Fund in the late 1920s and 1930s.  

Figure 3.18: Photo of Cheek Hall under construction (above) and an architectural perspective drawing of the proposed building design (below), “Allen-White High School fundraising letter,” 3, 1942. Courtesy of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville Digital Collections.

303 Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools*, 131-142.
Agnes L. Tierney Hall was planned to house the laundry, heating plant, a cafeteria, a practice kitchen for the home economics students, and a guest dining hall. Gilbert Hall, possibly named after founding trustee Dr. Gilbert Shelton, would become the new home for all other industrial training classes for the home economics department, as well as a health center, and a “practice school for good housekeeping.” Cheek Hall would be the new home for a recreation center and gymnasium, and a new “community meeting house.” The adjoining buildings were also said to be home to a baby clinic used to train female students in nursery practices and provide childcare for local women, and a new vocational library, although it is not clear exactly where these new facilities were located. It is assumed that the new buildings would also house the trade and agriculture departments for high school boys in addition to classes that would continue operating out of Howse Hall and the existing outdoor spaces on campus. In February 1943, AW’s Board of Trustees purchased additional land from Principal J.H. White ownership at the School’s north to accommodate the size of the new Cheek Hall project.

Accomplishing the monolithic three-building construction project quickly proved to be a difficult undertaking. Principal White’s ability to secure financing for the project was inconsistent, and construction frequently lapsed due to a labor shortage caused by the end of the NYA program on the School’s campus in 1941 when the United States shifted federal funding priorities away from New Deal programs and toward home front defense. Many young men went overseas to fight in the Second World War, including those in Whiteville, leaving rural school construction projects across the South short staffed and incomplete. Refusing to accept defeat, Principal White wrote letters to major political benefactors, including Eleanor Roosevelt, to whom he wrote on July 23, 1942 explaining the situation at AW. In his correspondence, White pleas for assistance from the First Lady, claiming that $11,000 worth of construction has already been paid for and materialized, including “all of our window frames, 59,000 concrete blocks, our saw mill cut the trees and sawed all the rough labor, one friend gave us our glass for the windows, we have all our electrical materials, all the plumbing materials, hard wood flowing and other building materials for the work.” But according to White, the unfinished project remains open to the weather and the morale was low. He asked the First Lady to help guide him in

securing $20,000 to complete the project, writing that White residents in Hardeman County are generally supportive and “help as individuals all they can possibly do and at the same time carry on the work of their schools.”

Mrs. Roosevelt did not respond directly to Principal White, but rather forwarded his request to the office of Edwin R. Embree, then President of the Rosenwald Fund, asking if the philanthropy could provide the needed assistance to the Allen-White School. A letter to the White House from Embree’s secretary Dorothy A. Elvidge dated August 24, 1942 explained that the Fund was no longer able to help assist rural schools with construction grants after having phased out the rural school building program in 1932. The denial to provide grant assistance to AW was indicative of the Rosenwald Fund’s shifting objective under Embree to focus on social programs rather than school building construction moving forward. It would be entirely up to the Hardeman County community and their ability to solicit private donors and public funding to complete the project.306

Simultaneously, Principal White appealed to Dr. Fred McCuiston, who visited the campus again with W.E. Turner to make a survey of AW’s needs later that year. With McCuiston’s endorsement, the GEB gave the Hardeman County Board of Education $13,500 in 1944 and followed with another gift of $17,500 in 1947 “for the completion and equipping of the vocational building.”307 In 1946, Allen-White was chosen to participate Fisk University’s Southern Rural Life Program under sociology professor Charles S. Johnson. As part of a work-study program, Fisk students lived and worked at Allen-White and taught classes to count toward their teacher training experience in industrial training and liberal arts. During their stay, the college students resided in cottages near the School’s campus and assisted with various clubs and organizations. The partnership between the schools undoubtedly led to increased publicity in Nashville on behalf of Allen-White’s mission, which probably brought even more donations into the School.308

By the end of the decade, the steadfast Principal had obtained donations from several notable philanthropic organizations nationwide, including $2,500 from the Erwin Freund Foundation of Chicago in 1945, $7,500 from the Marshall Field Foundation in the same year, $5,000 from the Phelps-Stokes Foundation, and $7,500 from the Kellogg Foundation in 1946. By 1948, ten years after the initial Cheek Hall project, Allen-White had raised a total of $60,000 from community fundraising campaigns and private philanthropic organizations to complete the reconstruction and expansion of the high school vocational building. The residents of Hardeman County had once again demonstrated their dedication to the cause for Black education in Whiteville via grassroots community fundraising tactics and tenacious outreach to Progressive supporters of the self-determination ethos that dominated the philanthropic landscape during the Jim Crow Era.  

The three brick buildings were finally completed in the 1947-1948 school year. The community’s choice to incorporate brick and concrete into the design this time, instead of wood siding, may have been a conscious choice to utilize more fire resistant—and expensive—materials to reduce potential fire risks caused by arson and to actively push back against those who opposed the School’s expansion. (Figure 3.19) Gilbert Hall and Agnes L Tierney Hall were dedicated in a weekend-long ceremony November 12-14, 1947. Despite having not contributed financially to the project, representatives of the Rosenwald Fund in Nashville were invited by Principal White to attend the dedication, to which secretary Dorothy Elvidge politely declined.  

The Cheek Hall building was later dedicated on April 22, 1948, and deeded to the Hardeman County Board of Education in the following years. After his decade-long effort to complete the new school facilities, Principal White reflected on the community’s success, writing:

A true story now comes to an end—this dream has come true. The buildings have been completed and dedicated, modern equipment to serve the boys and girls who come to the [School] for guidance. Gilbert Hall, Agnes [L.] Tierney Hall, and Cheek Hall now stand as a great community accomplishment. As the community goes forward, Mr. W.E. Turner, State Agent of Negro Schools and Coordinator of Higher Education, whose untiring efforts in the cause, will continue to win more and more the admiration and praise of these people who so deeply appreciate his interest in the youth of the community.  

---

New Leadership and a Modern Curriculum in the Civil Rights Era, 1948-1969

After serving twenty years in Whiteville, J.H. White resigned from his position as Principal at the end of the 1947-1948 school year. The educator had been determined to see through the Cheek Hall reconstruction project, which delayed his departure ten years past his initial notice to Turner. During his tenure, Principal White indeed accomplished what the founder Jesse C. Allen and the Board of Trustees intended. In two decades, the School had grown from a single Rosenwald six-classroom building to include almost a dozen buildings on campus that served students from pre-school through twelfth grade. J.H. White left Allen-White a fully operational school plant owed the same amount of respect and prestige as any comparable White school at the time. He went on to work in higher education, assuming the Presidency of Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee the following year at age 41, just one year past his original goal as a young boy. White later founded his own HBCU campus, Mississippi Valley State College in Itta Bena, Mississippi which still exists today (now called Mississippi Valley State University).312

Over the course of the next twenty years, the mission at Allen-White and other county training schools shifted away from school building construction campaigns financed by philanthropic foundations and toward modernizing school curriculum with publicly funded tax

312 White, Up from a Cotton Patch; Robertson, Education, 39. For more information about the life’s work of James H. White, an excellent archive of his personal materials is housed in the Mississippi Valley State University Special Collections Library.
revenue. In fact, several of the buildings on campus were demolished over the next decades, signaling a consolidation of school departments. During this time, the Jim Crow Era transitioned into the Civil Rights Era, and the push for equal rights in all aspects of Black citizenry intensified. In the field of education, “incremental steps toward equity were no longer sufficient,” as historian Mary Hoffschwelle writes, and during the next two decades, Black Americans “would wage multiple campaigns for equality and inclusion and challenge all Tennesseans to recognize each child’s right to a public education.” But even with statewide pressure to equalize and integrate schools, Allen-White remained the only Black high school in Hardeman County in 1959 when Bolivar Industrial Jr. High School finally became a four-year institution.

After Principal White’s departure, he was succeeded by Carl L. Seets, a former member of AW’s Board of Trustees and PTA. During his principalship, Seets modified the interior of the new Cheek Hall complex to house classes in typewriting and shorthand to prepare female students for careers in the modern workplace. This was the first step in the School’s curriculum expansion, and girls were now able to obtain training in skills beyond the domestic arts. In 1949, Allen-White received accreditation for two more years, thus becoming an optional six-year training school for Black students. Principal Seets was also responsible for establishing a general business department for students, and he made significant improvements to the quality of education and equipment in the science department.

Seets left his position in 1952 and was replaced by Major A. Jarrett, a former student of the Allen-White School. Under Jarrett’s administration, AW continued to modernize, with general business classes, cosmetology classes, and driver’s education added for both male and female students, making Allen-White the only high school in Hardeman County—White or Black—to offer them. Jarrett remained principal of Allen-White for the next eighteen years, until 1970. The curriculum advancements made under Principals Seets and Jarrett represented a greater pattern of modernization for southern Black schools during the Civil Rights Era. Students at Allen-White now had more access to liberal arts training to prepare them for higher education and a diverse array of careers beyond agricultural and trade work.

---

During the 1960s, efforts were made to separate the still-expanding elementary school from the high school facilities at AW. In 1964, a new elementary school building was erected on campus, and in the 1966-1967 school year, a separate administration was formed for the management and supervision of the lower school grades K-6. C. Elma Motley, a teacher at Union Springs Elementary School, was appointed Principal of AW’s new elementary division. She was succeeded by former student Evelyn C. Robertson Jr. after retiring in 1969. According to a 1967 study by graduate student Nannie S.J. Pratt, Allen-White had on staff eleven elementary school teachers, four middle school teachers, eleven high school teachers, and two counselors between the years 1963-1966. At the time, the school enrolled eight hundred total students in first grade through twelfth grade. By the middle of the decade, AW was well equipped with modern school equipment, including movie projectors, tape recorders, televisions, record players, and library books for all grade levels. By the end of the decade, the school rivaled that of other White high schools in Hardeman County in terms of its modern curriculum and amenities.\footnote{Nannie S.J. Pratt, “To Study the Characteristics and Possible Causes of the High Rate of Dropouts in the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Grades Students at Allen White High School, Whiteville, Tennessee, 1963-1966 Inclusive,” (Master’s thesis, Tennessee A&I State University, 1967).}

**Elementary School, 1964**

In 1964, a ten-classroom elementary school building was erected immediately north of Dorris Hall to accommodate student enrollment, and is still extant today. (Figure 3.20) The two buildings were once connected by a concrete sidewalk that is no longer extant. The 1964 elementary school building is constructed of brick and concrete cinderblock masonry with vertical wood siding on its western façade where the front entrance is located. The elementary school has a flat asphalt and metal roof indicative of its modernist time period. The central entrance has a double-door entrance flanked by horizontal four-light windows with aluminum framing on either side. Above the door is a three panel transom window with aluminum framing as well. On the western façade of the building are equally spaced single-hung glass windows with aluminum casing that have been boarded. On the eastern façade, there are five bays of grouped windows that have been boarded as well. The building consists of ten roughly equal sized classrooms on either side of a central hallway. The building has additional amenities including offices and restrooms located at the center of the building near its entry lobby.
the building became the new home for the elementary department in 1964, Dorris Hall became a space used primarily for storage and additional classrooms or offices when needed. The elementary building has suffered significant damage since falling completely out of use in the 1980s. Many of the original windows and doors have been removed or damaged.\(^{316}\)

![Figure 3.20: Photograph of the new elementary school building, unknown photographer, view northeast. Allen-White High School yearbook, *The Mirror*, 1964. Courtesy of Evelyn C. Robertson Personal Collection.](image)

*Integration, Arson, and the End of Allen-White, 1970-1974*

The Civil Rights Era brought forth legislation that fundamentally altered the course of Black education in the United States. In the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court case, the Court decision ruled that U.S. state laws regarding segregation were unconstitutional. Their decision marked the end of a legally separated dual-public school system for Black and White students in the American South. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin further cemented the illegality of the Jim Crow segregation laws. Unfortunately, these laws did not have much of an immediate impact on school segregation in Tennessee, or throughout the southern region writ large, especially in rural areas that were staunchly segregated. Some Tennessee counties began taking steps to integrate their school systems in the late 1950s, however the majority of counties withheld from the new policy until pressured by the federal government in the 1960s.

Hardeman County was one of the last Tennessee counties to integrate after receiving pushback from both Black and White residents. Consistent with the general West Tennessee

---

region, many rural White residents were staunchly against an integrated school system resulting from their own supremacist ideologies. Black residents, however, were understandably reluctant to integrate in part because of the substantial and meaningful advancements to Black education made by local community members at Allen-White and other Black public schools in the County. Many Black residents believed that if schools integrated, the sense of community pride that enriched Rosenwald campuses would be lost, and Black students would be treated as second class citizens at formerly White schools. They also knew that if schools integrated in the area, preference would be given to White school campuses and teachers, and Black schools like Allen-White and Bolivar Industrial would lose everything their communities had worked so hard to attain over the last half-century. But despite the efforts to postpone integration, Hardeman County finally adopted the policy in 1969, and thus ensured the “demise” of Black schools in the County. AW closed its doors to Cheek Hall and the high school department in the following year, and the 1970 class marked the last graduating class of Allen-White High School.

Just one year after AW’s high school closed, the Whiteville community suffered yet another devastating fire. When the high school closed in 1970, the Hardeman County Board of Education—who by that point owned all of the buildings on campus—salvaged and sold the remaining construction materials and architectural elements of Cheek Hall, including its windows and doors, to a local White business owner named Shaw Pinner for a new building he was constructing in Whiteville. Before the materials could be moved, the three-building Cheek Hall complex was destroyed by an arson fire on Monday, February 8, 1971, almost thirty-one years after the original Cheek Hall structure burned, also likely by arson. The 1964 elementary building was set on fire the following evening of Tuesday, February 9, but the neighboring Bolivar Fire Department was able to stop the fire before it caused significant damage to the building. The Hardeman County Sheriff Department launched an investigation and ruled the case an arson, because both fires were “started under the floor of the building and paper was used to set the blaze.” The investigation was soon dropped, and the perpetrator or perpetrators were never found.317

After the arson attack, the 1964 AW elementary school building continued to operate as Whiteville Northside Elementary School for about four more years. During this time, a replacement school building was under construction nearby to consolidate students with the formerly all-White Whiteville Elementary School. After the elementary school students moved to the new integrated building around 1974, the Allen-White campus was officially closed. 318

The dorms, Principal’s home, and other ancillary academic buildings had been demolished between 1940-1960 when bus transportation to AW became more accessible and dorms were no longer needed, and the School’s academic departments consolidated within the new elementary building and the Cheek Hall high school complex before it burned. Of the eleven total buildings completed on campus during Allen-White’s history—which existed at various times—only two remained when the School closed in 1974: The first building constructed, the original Rosenwald-funded Dorris Hall, and the last building constructed, the 1964 elementary school building.

Although the Rosenwald Fund’s emphasis on constructing county training schools was successful throughout the entire region, the Allen-White School grew to become an exemplary model for the Fund’s ambitions. It became a fully operational institution of K-12 public education that offered Black students diverse courses in both liberal arts and industrial training that paralleled—and often even surpassed—the quality of White education in the area over the course of its campus development. The story of AW involved many significant figures in educational theory, but nonetheless has largely disappeared from the vernacular landscape. The following chapter outlines potential tools of heritage conservation that may be used to identify the importance of the site’s story, while also finding a path toward allowing its physical remains to nurture that story into the future.

318 No other buildings were in use on campus during this time. Woods, “Julius Rosenwald Fund,” 1-2; McKinney, “Allen-White School,” 6-7; Robertson, Education, 41-45; Smithwick, “Rosenwald Revisited” interviews, 2005-2006; Author, student interviews, 2022.
Figure 3.21: Site plan of the Allen-White School during its heightened construction period, ca. 1930-1950. Designed by the author using composited 1947 and 1954 base aerial photographs, December 2022.
Chapter 4. Saving Allen-White: Exploring Various Avenues of Heritage Conservation

Early Efforts to Conserve the Allen-White Campus

Building Uses after School Closure

When the Allen-White School (AW) campus closed around 1974, only two of the almost a dozen buildings remained on campus: Dorris Hall and the 1964 elementary school building. The 1971 arson attack on the second Cheek Hall building was devastating to the School community, especially those students and faculty members who were part of the Cheek Hall reconstruction efforts after the first building was destroyed by fire in 1940. But the Hardeman County School Board, which owned the AW campus by this time, was entirely focused on peacefully integrating the County’s public school system during the 1970s, and thus made no effort to conserve the two remaining buildings on campus. Concurrently, there was no immediate effort on behalf of the local Black community to purchase and conserve the campus in the first few years following AW’s closure. As a result, both Dorris Hall and the elementary school building were subject to various uses and threatened by demolition in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In the early 1970s, Dorris Hall—the original Rosenwald brick building—was leased to a local beauty school for use as cosmetology classroom and lab. Sometime between 1976-1980 the building was used as a community cannery. In 1982, the land and both extant AW buildings were purchased from the County School Board by the Whiteville Business Enterprise, LLC (WBE), a local business organization whose founders consisted of a few Allen-White alumna. Their intention was to rehabilitate the 1964 elementary school building into a conglomeration of small, Black-owned businesses. In the 1980s, the WBE operated a grocery store, a laundromat, a bar, and several other small businesses in the old elementary building. During these years, however, Dorris Hall fell largely out of use and functioned primarily as a storage facility.
Figure 4.1: Site plan of the abandoned Allen-White School campus, ca. 2022. Designed by the author using a Google Earth aerial image, January 2023.
In the early 1990s, the AW campus, which now totaled 7.1 acres and included the two extant buildings, was purchased from the WBE by the neighboring Elcanaan Baptist Church (Church), and at that point the 1964 elementary school building also became vacant. (Figure 4.2) The purchase was spearheaded by former AW principals and Church parishioners Evelyn C. Robertson Jr. and Major A. Jarrett. Allen-White and Elcanaan shared a symbiotic relationship over the School’s history, and many local students’ families were also members of the Church. Throughout the decades, Elcanaan was home to numerous fundraising events for the School, including social events organized by the PTA and school faculty, the majority of whom were also members of the Church. Under the leadership of Robertson, Jarrett, and several other AW alumni who were also members, efforts to conserve the two remaining campus buildings finally took hold as the twenty-first century approached. The Church membership organized behind the effort, and plans to first rehabilitate the Dorris Hall building once again took shape. This time, the aim was to create a mixed-use community cultural center that would offer vocational training and a museum space to interpret the history of the Allen-White School.319

---

319 Information about the community’s conservation efforts written in this chapter are primarily based on oral history interviews with former Allen-White students, conducted by the author between October 13-14, 2022, in Whiteville, Tennessee. Subjects include Evelyn C. Robertson, Odell Greene, Charles Johnson, Fredell Harris, Cosette Crawford, Ocie Holmes, George Dotson, and Johnny Shaw. Additional information was gleaned from the following sources: Evelyn C. Robertson, email message to author, November 18, 2022; Ann Smithwick, “Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders,” Oral History and Photography Project, 2005-2006 oral history interviews with Allen-White students; “Building for the Future: Building on Our Past,” fundraising pamphlet distributed by the Elcanaan Community Help Organization (ECHO) in 2019. https://www.allenwhitecenter.org/, accessed December 7, 2022.
Protecting a Community Asset with Grassroots Planning Efforts

Rehabilitation planning and subsequent fundraising efforts by the Elcanaan community remained slow in the early years of the 2000s, although AW did receive some protection and exposure with the help of Rosenwald historians in Tennessee at the time. In 2005, Dorris Hall was surveyed by architectural historian Carroll Van West of the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro. The CHP has played an instrumental role in documenting Tennessee’s last remaining Rosenwald schools. In 1993, historians with the CHP organized and funded the first academic conference in the state about the schools and their legacy. Dr. West was contacted by community leaders in Whiteville who sought statewide protection for the historic Dorris Hall building.

Following his survey of the Allen-White campus, the building was deemed historically significant for its association with events in the contexts of “African American Ethnic Heritage,” “Social History,” and “Education” between the established period of significance ranging from 1918-1955, themes which fall under the National Register of Historic Places (NR) nomination Criterion A. The NR is the United States’ official list of buildings, structures, objects, sites, and districts that are considered worthy of conservation because of their significance in aspects of American history such as architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. A place’s
nomination to the NR in contingent on its ability to meet one of the four established Criterion that constitute historic significance, per the National Park Service. The four Criterion include: Criterion A, for the place’s association with historic patterns of events or development, Criterion B, its association with the life of an important person, Criterion C, its architectural design or construction value, or Criterion D, its archeological significance in conveying information about prehistory or history. Because it was found to be historically significant under Criterion A, AW’s Dorris Hall was listed on the NR, a move which guaranteed additional bureaucratic protections to ensure the building would remain standing for future use. As a result of the Whiteville community’s conservation action, Dorris Hall became the first Rosenwald school in Tennessee to be placed on the State of Tennessee and National Register of Historic Places on November 9, 2005.

AW’s placement on the NR renewed local interest in campus rehabilitation efforts. In 2008, the Elcanaan community created a 501c3 nonprofit organization called the Elcanaan Community Hope Organization, or ECHO. The purpose of the organization, which still exists today, was to formalize rehabilitation plans for AW’s campus buildings and to consolidate fundraising efforts for the future “Allen-White Center for Education and Cultural Advancement,” which, once constructed, would operate out of both the Dorris Hall and the 1964 elementary school building. In addition to cultural meeting spaces and an interpretive museum, the rehabilitated facility would include workforce development programs and facilities to “continue the educational aspect” associated with the rich history of the School.

According to various ECHO members, the proposed rehabilitation project was compliant with the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation and required minimal changes to the extant buildings. The concrete foundations of both Dorris Hall and the modern elementary school were evaluated for structural stability, and the brick cladding of both buildings was still in

322 For the remainder of this chapter, the acronym “ECHO” will be used interchangeably with other terms to describe the local community, such as “the Whiteville community,” “the Hardeman County Community,” “the residents of Whiteville,” etc.
good condition in the 2000s. (Figure 4.3) The majority of the project’s rehabilitation work would involve replacing historic windows and doors that had been vandalized or stolen, removing graffiti from the interior and exterior walls, and updating the interior of each facility to accommodate its new uses. At the time, the building retained its architectural integrity as only a few changes had been made to the 1920 Dorris Hall building since it stopped being used by the Allen-White School in 1971. These included the installation of a single-wood door around 1982 by the WBE and new metal roofing and vinyl eaves installed around 2002 when the Elcanaan community took steps to stabilize and protect the campus facilities. By the end of the decade, Whiteville’s community morale was high, and a grassroots fundraising campaign was underway to expedite the new campus vision.324

Figure 4.3: Dorris Hall as it stood ca. 2006 during the rehabilitation efforts prior to the 2012 arson. Photographed by Carroll Van West, view northeast. Courtesy of the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, Digital Initiatives, James E. Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University.

Another Arson and a New Era

Around 2:30 am on May 20, 2012, the campus was once again struck by an arsonist who aimed to wreak havoc on the Allen-White community. The attacker(s) targeted the original Dorris Hall Rosenwald building. The fire destroyed much of the building and its architectural integrity was lost. (Figure 4.4) Like the Cheek Hall arson in 1971, the fire was obviously intentional because the Dorris Hall building had not had electricity in several years, so an electrical fire was not a possibility. Local community leader Evelyn C. Robertson worked with the Whiteville Police Department to investigate the case, but inadequate evidence was found to convict the suspected arsonist, and no connection was drawn to the previous two attacks on the county training school’s campus. Robertson believes that while the first Cheek Hall burning in 1940 very likely had “racial undertones,” he’s unsure if the attacks in 1971 and 2012 were racially motivated or the work of some “distracted individual” or perhaps a “disgruntled person.” But the attacks in Whiteville reflect a greater pattern of arson attacks on Rosenwald schools throughout the South, all of which are the result of hostility by local white supremacists. “It’s just really baffling,” said Robertson, “…I mean, human nature hasn’t changed, you know? That person’s still out there somewhere. That person probably is, you know, amazed at what we’re still trying to do based on what they’ve already done. But that’s not detracting us from trying to move forward.”325

325 Robertson interview, 2022; West email, 2022; “Evelyn C. Robertson to Carroll Van West, 2012,” personal correspondence informing Dr. West of the 2012 arson attack, Southern Places Collection, Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation.
Despite yet another arson attack on campus, the local Black community still intends to implement a conservation plan for the Allen-White School campus. Their efforts to conserve the tangible legacy of Allen-White reflects the longstanding efforts of their predecessors, Jesse C. Allen and James H. White, who both dedicated themselves to the cause of Black education in Hardeman County. The ethos of Black uplift ingrained within the School is even embedded in ECHO’s mission for a future Allen-White Community Center, which is to provide “remediation, career preparation, and improved access to locally available and population focused technical training and higher education to prepare youth and disenfranchised adults for gainful employment in occupations that pay a living wage” in Hardeman County. These efforts are well-timed because in recent years, Hardeman County was designated an economically “distressed county” by the State, undoubtedly resulting from decades of inequity and government neglect of
the Black community, a racialized group which has historically maintained between one-third and almost one-half of the County’s population and workforce.326

The locals community’s intention to turn the former AW campus into a place that offers public spaces and vocational training facilities to ensure rural Black residents have opportunities for upward economic mobility is synonymous with the goal of the Rosenwald Fund’s school building program and the mission of AW’s founders. Furthermore, facilities for workforce training remain a much-needed resource in Hardeman County today. But since the 2012 fire, the Whiteville community has entered a new era in their effort to conserve the Allen-White School, one that offers multiple interpretive choices through a myriad of possible treatment approaches. To accomplish their goal, the Elcanaan Community Hope Organization, which is still spearheading the conservation efforts for the AW campus today, not only need more widespread financial support and advocacy, but to perhaps consider alternative treatment options and expanded methodologies. Doing so will allow local leaders to create a new place to gather and learn while still conserving the campus’s fragile architectural resources and intangible cultural heritage, which, together, tell the multi-layered story of conflict and resilience that has strengthened the collective memory of the Allen-White community over the last one hundred years. The following sections illustrate a few of these potential avenues for conserving both the tangible and intangible heritage of the Allen-White School.

Possible Treatment Options for the Tangible Built Environment

*The Four Treatments and their Intended Applications*

The *Secretary of the Interior’s (SOI) Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, colloquially referred to as “the Standards,” currently provide an advisory framework for the treatment of historic buildings. The intention of the Standards is to provide guidance for building owners, conservation consultants, architects, and other professionals of the built environment

---

through an established set of “nationally recognized criteria for determining the appropriate changes to historic buildings and sites.” Published and managed by the National Park Service (NPS), the Standards have been adopted within state and local ordinances to implement consistent regulations at all governmental levels. The Standards address four treatment options as viable intervention strategies to conserve historic buildings, and includes separate guidelines for each approach: preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction.

During the conservation process, a SOI treatment is chosen based on its appropriateness for the scope of the project and specific site conditions, which vary on a case-by-case basis. The preservation treatment is intended simply to protect, stabilize, and maintain a historic property without significant alterations to its current condition. Rehabilitation, which is the most widely applied treatment option, is used for buildings that need repair, alterations, or additions to execute a compatible use for the historic building while still preserving features which convey its historic value. Rehabilitation is often referred to as “adaptive use” because of the SOI Rehabilitation Guidelines’ flexibility to assign a new use of the property. Restoration refers to the act of depicting the property’s form, features, and character as they once appeared at a particular period of time. To accomplish this, the SOI Guidelines for Restoration necessitate that any features from other time periods be removed and any missing features from the period be restored. Lastly, the reconstruction treatment is denoted by its use of new construction to emulate the form and features of a site, landscape, building, structure, or object in its historic location that no longer survives. The SOI Guidelines for Reconstruction suggest this treatment is primarily used for interpretive purposes with all new materials that replicate the property’s original appearance. Overall, the Standards acknowledge the need to include “limited and sensitive” upgrades to the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems of historic structures to assure their ongoing functionality and sustainability.

In the case of the Allen-White School (School), several potential treatment options would be appropriate to conserve the campus’s remaining two buildings, per the SOI Standards. First,

---

the Whiteville community might choose to reconstruct the original Dorris Hall building as it appeared when it was first built in 1920 and remained on campus until the School closed in the 1970s. A reconstruction project would require new construction materials to emulate the original building. For example, reconstructing Dorris Hall would require the community to augment the building’s remaining walls with new construction, reconstruct the roof and interior walls, and make other architectural changes that replicate the building as it stood during its period of historic significance. A second option for the local community is to stabilize and preserve Dorris Hall in its current state as a ruin, a move that would highlight the School’s history of hostility and resilience. A third option is to first stabilize Dorris Hall, but then focus the community’s conservation efforts on rehabilitating the 1964 elementary school instead. An adaptive use project would help generate immediate revenue to then address options for conserving Dorris Hall in the future. Lastly, a combination of two or more of these treatments—reconstruction, preservation, and rehabilitation—may be advantageous to create new meaning on campus and celebrate AW’s history while still accurately conveying its past. Below is an analysis of a few potential treatment options along with case study examples of each that represent the diverse approaches available to conserve the Allen-White School’s remaining built environment.

**Option One: Reconstructing Dorris Hall**

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, ECHO was working with Dr. West and the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University to plan museum exhibitions for the rehabilitated campus facilities. When Dorris Hall building was incinerated in May 2012, the scope of the project changed drastically. The original Rosenwald building lost most of its structural integrity and architectural features as a result of the damage caused by the fire, which meant a new conservation approach was needed. Overnight, the chosen SOI rehabilitation treatment was no longer feasible, and the community had to assess other conservation options. Once again, the residents of Hardeman County rallied to overcome the catastrophic racialized violence that seemed to perpetually target their campus, and local leaders decided to shift the treatment approach to a total reconstruction of the 1920 building. In the following months, ECHO organizers hired an architect and building engineer to survey the two campus buildings and create construction plan drawings for a reconstructed Dorris Hall. (Figure
4.5) The building engineer found that Dorris Hall’s foundation remained structurally sound, however its brick-framed walls needed total replacement.

At present, ECHO and the Whiteville community plan to remove Dorris Hall’s damaged concrete and brick materials and replace them with new construction materials situated on top of the original foundation in roughly the same 6-A “H” shaped floor plan design originated by Samuel L. Smith and Fletcher B. Dresslar and published in the Rosenwald Fund’s Community School Plans pamphlets. The project leaders hope to reuse some of the building’s original brick, however much of it must be replaced to safeguard the new building’s structural stability. Because it was not subject to the most recent arson attack, the extant elementary school building to the north of Dorris Hall is still considered a rehabilitation project in its own right, given the building’s predominate need for interior repairs. However, plans to rehabilitate the later facility remain secondary to conserving the original Rosenwald building.

Consequently, the fundraising campaign to reconstruct Allen-White’s Dorris Hall has amplified in recent years. In 2016, ECHO received a $90,000 grant from the State of Tennessee, largely through the leadership of State Representative Johnny Shaw, who graduated from Allen-White in 1963. ECHO leaders then worked with the Southwest Tennessee Development District (SWTDD) in 2018 to secure project consultation and funding strategy development assistance
from the Jones-Bridget Consulting Group in Nashville. Through this partnership, ECHO has been able to expand its benefactors to include the West Tennessee Healthcare Foundation, Jackson State Community College, and the USDA Rural Development program, among other Tennessee state government departments. The following year, ECHO prepared the “Allen-White Center for Education and Cultural Advancement Capital Campaign Case Statement,” which was presented to various Tennessee government officials, including Governor Bill Lee, for his consideration “in keeping with his administration’s dual focus on rural economic development in Tennessee’s distressed counties and support for non-profit and faith-based initiatives.” ECHO’s pitch to legislators statewide proved successful, and in May 2019, the Whiteville community received another construction grant from the State of Tennessee totaling $50,000. While these grants certainly push ECHO toward its conservation goal, their sum total is not nearly enough to accomplish the campus vision. Consequently, at the time of writing, the efforts to reconstruct AW’s Dorris Hall remain ongoing, almost fifty years after the county training school closed its doors.

When discussing whether reconstruction is an appropriate option for lost cultural resources like Dorris Hall, the question of authenticity always arises. The reconstruction approach is meant to provide context for interpretation. However, many heritage professionals and scholars argue that because reconstruction involves the most change to a property, its extreme nature may actually be more detrimental than beneficial in conveying an authentic representation of the site’s history. Scholar Michael James Kelleher begs the question, “why destroy the last authentic remains of a historic structure, in order to construct a modern facsimile of it?” Architect Albert Good was among the first to criticize American reconstruction projects for their ability to make buildings appear “more glamorous” than they actually were in original form. Good writes that “misguided efforts” in reconstruction projects “have forever lost to us much that was authentic, if crumbling…while the faint shadow of the genuine often makes more intelligent appeal to the imagination than the crass and visionary replica.”

The belief that reconstructed buildings present an “artificial illusion” of what once stood and therefore diminish authenticity is synonymous with the argument against the

“Disneyfication” of architecture, a phenomenon that’s gained criticism in recent years. Steeped in nostalgia, “Disneyfied” reconstruction projects often depict a “faux-heritage” or “hyperreality” of place, typically in an effort to commodify heritage for tourism purposes. But the term has seeped into vernacular reconstruction projects as well, with critics arguing that the SOI’s reconstruction treatment inherently presents a “Disneyfied” or simplified representation of the past, and falsely interprets the heritage of a place.

However, the above arguments place a higher value on the authenticity of physical materials and the significance of the tangible fabric of a building, rather than its interpretive meaning or ability to educate the public on past events. Heritage conservationist Randall Mason writes that, if we are to “[assume] these material efforts tacitly shape memory,” and are to “[concern] ourselves with reshaping memory,” heritage professionals must focus less on “fixing things” and instead on “sustaining memory” via the built environment. He argues that although the relationship between building fabric and memory is the fundamental connection by which we assign meaning and significance to places, the almost obsessive need to address “material matters” has “now become the tail that is wagging the dog.”

Fellow conservationist Donovan D. Rypkema agrees, contending that heritage professionals “need to reestablish the relationship between why something is deemed worthy of historic designation and the rules we have in place to maintain its significance.” He continues by questioning the current framework for treatment selection, writing that “if materials, for example, were in no way part of what creates the significance of the building, why are we being rabid about what materials are used…?” Translated to the ongoing efforts on the AW campus, Rypkema would argue that new brick replacing Dorris Hall’s original brick should not be a constraining factor in conserving the site, because it does not restrict its ability to convey significant historical meaning. In response to scrutiny surrounding the concept of authenticity, the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity further defines the term and attempts to broaden its

---


333 Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 33; Shulan Fu and Jean Hillier, “Disneyfication or Self-Referentiality: Recent Conservation Efforts and Modern Planning History in Datong,” in *China: A Historical Geography of the Urban*, Palgrave Macmillan, November 21, 2017, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64042-6_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64042-6_8).


meaning beyond the traditional Western-centric emphasis on material significance. By creating a
global standard that assigns historic significance according to a range of cultural factors beyond
the authenticity of building materials, the 1994 document represents the heritage industry’s
changing values as being potentially more inclusive of reconstruction projects, as long as they
authentically convey collective memory and reflect community needs.336

One such example of the shifting dialogue in the global heritage community is Dresden’s
eighteenth century Frauenkirche, which was razed by Allied bombing in 1945 and reconstructed
over sixty years later in 2006. The topic of much national debate in Germany, the cathedral was
reduced to rubble during the War and remained a painful reminder of the Nazi era for decades.
After post-Communist reunification in 1990, a renewed enthusiasm for German nationalism
drove efforts to reconstruct the church, a project which ultimately had more to do with the
country’s re-unification than it did with the Frauenkirche’s destruction. The cathedral was rebuilt
almost exactly as it stood prior to the War, a site that what was once a harrowing reminder of a
painful past now representative of Germany’s recovery and future. Despite criticism from
conservationists who would have preferred alternative treatment approaches that favored the
materiality of the original Frauenkirche, the building that stands today represents a broader idea
of authenticity as defined by the people of Germany.337

Like the Frauenkirche, the choice to reconstruct Allen-White’s Dorris Hall reflects the
community’s desire to convey the School’s cultural significance as a representation of its
collective memory. By including a vocational training center and museum, ECHO hopes to
provide an authentic interpretation of the building as it once stood, both in function and
architectural appearance. Given the expanded conversation in the heritage field surrounding the
topic of authenticity, their goal can certainly be achieved, especially with the level of
documentation that already exists. If representation is the primary objective, historic photographs
and Dr. West’s National Register survey would certainly provide enough evidence for an
accurate reconstruction. This was the method used for other significant reconstruction projects in
the United States, like the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg and George Washington’s treading

337 Robert Garland Thomson, “Authenticity and the Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Historic Sites,” CRM: The
barn at Mount Vernon.\textsuperscript{338} Because the current vision for a reconstructed Dorris Hall is meant to serve the local community rather than a broader tourist market, the project can easily avoid the “Disneyfication” effect that often skews cultural representation in the built environment to generate a profit. Moreover, AW’s Dorris Hall was nominated for the National Register based on its association with patterns of Black heritage (Criterion A), rather than its architectural merit (Criterion C), which allows for a more flexible treatment approach than had the building represented the work of a master architect or a significant architectural style.

But by neglecting the architectural significance of Dorris Hall’s original material fabric with the reconstruction treatment approach, it could be argued that there is a missed opportunity in the community’s conservation efforts to convey the campus history more authentically. The building reflects the early work of the Rosenwald Fund’s Nashville-based school building program masterminds Samuel L. Smith and Fletcher B. Dresslar, and thus served as a model for other Rosenwald funded county training schools built in the years following. Even more significant is Dorris Hall’s designation as the first brick Rosenwald building in Tennessee, and most likely in the entire South. The use of brick represents the work of the trade students at Allen-White, the ingenuity of the Whiteville community, and their determination to erect a school by any means possible in the early years of AW’s history. To take away the original construction materials and replace them with a new building fabric may detract not only from the School’s architectural authenticity, but from its ability to authentically reflect the self-determination philosophy that represented Rosenwald school communities and the Fund’s founders. For this reason, reconstruction may not be the best SOI treatment for Dorris Hall. Therefore, community leaders in Whiteville are urged to consider a broader selection of treatment options that address AW’s tangible built environment.

\textit{Understanding Sites of Conflict and Conscience}

To select the most appropriate treatment, the Whiteville community must address another layer of Allen-White’s history that has yet to be considered in their conservation efforts: arson. Although unproven by the local judicial system, AW has suffered four arson attacks in its history. The first was the fire that burned the Whiteville Masonic Lodge in 1910, home to the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children. Next, the original wood-framed Cheek Hall building

\textsuperscript{338} Tyler et al., \textit{Historic Preservation}, 208-209.
burned in 1941, followed by an attack on the new brick Cheek Hall complex in 1971. Finally, the 1920 Dorris Hall building met the same fate in 2012. Arson tells a painful story of the past, one that perhaps the Whiteville community would prefer to forget. But when it comes to authenticity in heritage conservation, the multiple occurrences of arson on Allen-White’s campus should not be overlooked within the broader context of racism in the Jim Crow South. Instead, ECHO and the Hardeman County community might consider a new perspective, one that acknowledges AW’s campus as a conflict-impacted historic site, rather than simply a successful twentieth century institution for Black education worth reconstructing for parallel use.

In his article “Authenticity and the Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Historic Sites,” heritage conservationist and archeologist Robert Garland Thomson echoes the attitudes of Mason and Rypkema, calling for a new framework of “revised authenticities” that focus less on material authenticity per strict professional requirements, and instead on community responses to address post-conflict sites that have suffered extensive damage as being authentic in their own right, “even if only in memory.” Reflecting primarily on post-war sites of conflict, Thomson claims that:

Episodes of conflict (among other things, of course) contribute to the histories of buildings, often in dramatic or catastrophic ways that can permanently alter—or even destroy—their material integrity. Although these episodes certainly compromise a building’s originality and connection to a particular time or author, they can also imbue the structure with a new meaning or even enhance its previous significance.

Such is the case with Berlin’s 1895 Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche (Memorial Church) which, like Dresden’s Frauenkirche, was reduced to rubble in 1943 during World War II. Now a post-conflict site, Berliners chose a different approach to address the ruin’s difficult history. Instead of a complete reconstruction, architect Egon Eiermann was prompted by the local community to execute a combined reconstruction-preservation approach, one that rebuilt the monolithic cathedral using modern materials, yet still retained the original damaged church tower and some of the rubble that remained on site in the years following the War with glass encapsulation. Today, the Gedächtniskirche expresses a different and perhaps more complex message than in Dresden: one that depicts the successful recovery of post-war Germany while at the same time
serves as a reminder of the terror and suffering of the “wasteland” that was Berlin during the War years.339

Though not a war-torn site, the same sentiment illustrated by Thomson can be applied to AW’s campus, which has suffered multiple hostile “conflict episode[s]” of arson during its history, each of which have absolutely “[bestowed] new historic significance upon an already meaningful place.” Thomson argues that, ultimately, it is up to the site’s constituent community to decide the best course of action for reconstruction, or perhaps another desired treatment to address the site’s violent past. By this notion, AW’s community may find that the current “tabula rasa” reconstruction approach is best to reconcile and move forward from the arson attacks that have plagued the School’s history, a move that, according to the 1994 Nara Document and progressive conservationists, would construct a “revised authenticity” approach in its own right.340 But perhaps an alternate approach would allow AW’s existing building fabric, with Dorris Hall at its center, to stand as a “site of conscience” moving forward to convey both the School’s architectural and cultural authenticity. Defined as a place of memory “that prevents erasure from happening in order to ensure a more just and humane future,” sites of conscience also have the distinct ability to “provide safe spaces to remember and preserve even the most traumatic memories,” thus enabling their visitors “to make connections between the past and related contemporary human rights issues.”341

Two examples of existing sites of conscience in America include Manzanar National Historic Site in Northern California where 10,000 Japanese-Americans were imprisoned during World War II, and the Shockoe Bottom District in Richmond, Virginia, home to the country’s second-largest domestic marketplace for buying and selling enslaved persons after New Orleans. Both sites represent a new commitment in the heritage field to uncover places of shame in American history. And with racism an ongoing issue today, especially in the recent political climate of the United States at the time of writing, there is a dire need to create more sites of conscience across the country. In light of this, the Hardeman County community might instead choose to keep Dorris Hall in its dilapidated state as a site of conscience that represents the


\textit{Option Two: Preserving a Ruin}

To erase the physical impact of the last tragic arson event on AW’s campus with a reconstructed building in its place is to potentially negate the underlying causes of racism that created the segregated Rosenwald public school system in the first place. But the choice to reconstruct is an understandable one. Most communities that have suffered physical loss do not want to be reminded of a tragedy embedded in their heritage. In Whiteville, however, ECHO has the opportunity to tell the greater story of place and its relationship to racialized persons of the Black community through the tangible built environment that remains on campus. Confronting this layer of the School’s more troublesome history can help narrate the Hardeman County community’s astounding ability to overcome conflict by exploring themes of segregation, inequity, and—most importantly—resiliency that pervaded the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era American South. Therefore, per the SOI Standards, the appropriate treatment option to conserve Dorris Hall as a site of conscience would be preservation, which calls for stabilization and maintenance of the building with as few changes to its current state as possible.\footnote{Grimmer, \textit{The Standards}, 27-75.}

The remains of Dorris Hall, which have essentially been reduced to a ruin, serve as a striking example of the hostility that manifests from White supremacy. Arson is a sadly compelling part of the Allen-White story, and it represents the persistent White aggression that affects Rosenwald school communities across the South. So much so that in 1922, Smith and the Rosenwald Fund built arson into their grant allocation framework by offering additional funds to school communities that had been targeted by an arson attack.\footnote{Mary S. Hoffschwelle, \textit{The Rosenwald Schools of the American South} (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006): 121.} The choice to highlight rather than hide Whiteville’s history of arson by preserving Dorris Hall as a “noble ruin” would allow the remains of the building to speak for themselves in their current state, telling the story of AW’s layers of history without any enhancement or modification. The idea of ruins attaining truth and nobility as time passes with minimal intervention stems from nineteenth century
architectural writer John Ruskin, who believed that when it comes to interpreting architecture in future generations, the stone speaks for itself:

…let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for, and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say as they look upon the labour and wrought substance of them, ‘See! This our fathers did for us.’…For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor its gold. Its glory is in its age.\textsuperscript{345}

The ruin preservation approach offers ECHO the freedom to create a site of multifaceted meaning conveyed in its decay: a site of memory, of celebration, of pride, of remembrance, and of commemoration, one that would not even exist had it not been for the antipathy toward Black Americans perpetuated by racism in the first place.

Several strategies for conserving ruins have emerged in recent years, many of which place emphasis on conserving ruins as interpretive spaces with the SOI preservation treatment approach, or a combination of preservation with other SOI treatment options as was the case in Berlin. Perhaps the purest form of preservation is exemplified in the Genbaku Dome, or Hiroshima Peace Memorial in Japan. The building was the only structure that remained in the city center after the first American atomic bomb devastated the city. Through the efforts of the City of Hiroshima and its citizens, the site has been preserved in the same state as it was immediately after the bombing. Though lacking architectural integrity as a result of the bombing, the ruin has undergone minimum reinforcement with steel and synthetic resin over the years, which has helped stabilize and maintain the building’s material and cultural authenticity. A new layer of “spiritual authenticity” has been added by the Hiroshima community with the addition of a prayer space in the site’s “buffer zone.” The “silent structure” in its ruinous form represents the most destructive power of war “ever created by humankind,” and yet reminds us that there is hope in achieving world peace one day. The choice to preserve Hiroshima’s post-conflict Genbaku Dome as site of conscience in its state of rubble demonstrates the deeply emotional impact ruins can have on our collective memories of place.\textsuperscript{346}

One example of heritage conservation via the preservation approach that reflects a new layer of history is the Casa Grande Ruin in southern Arizona. Spanish for “big house,” the site

\textsuperscript{346} “Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome), Japan” UNESCO World Heritage List, accessed December 15, 2022, \url{https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775/}. 
was constructed in the thirteenth century by Sonoran Desert farming people who resided in the region at the time. The structure is made of caliche, a hardened natural cement made from earthen materials, using indigenous Hohokam building techniques. Despite its fragile state, the ruin has managed to survive extreme desert conditions for centuries since its abandonment in 1450. The nineteenth century saw an increased awareness and anthropological study of Casa Grande, which led to a higher volume of tourists and subsequent vandalism and graffiti on the historic site. In the last decades of the century, early American archeologists and heritage conservationists increased efforts to conserve the site by constructing a wood roof over the “big house” in 1903.

In 1906, Congress passed the Antiquities Act, which created the framework to protect prehistoric sites such as Casa Grande in the United States. Today, the original wood roof has been replaced by a new shelter designed in 1928 by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., the son of notable American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. The twentieth century hipped roof addition is made of steel with glass skylights and supported by angled columns. The choice to use modern materials rather than caliche fuses together traditional materials with contemporary ones, and is meant to create “as far a departure from the design and material of the ruin as can be obtained.” As a result, the new roof has gained historic significance in its own right over the past century since it was installed. The roof shelter is the only major protective alteration to the Casa Grande Ruin, a site otherwise preserved simply through routine maintained every two years. The inclusion of a roof shelter alters the meaning of Casa Grande by juxtaposing its prehistoric past with the modern present, which allows visitors to interpret the monument’s multilayered history through a conservation approach that highlights the authenticity of both architectural elements.347

Both of these case study examples implement a unique approach to the SOI preservation treatment of ruins in an effort to bridge the connection between people, space, and place at historic sites. There exists a multitude of ways to create meaningful spaces for heritage interpretation via preservation, especially at places that have suffered significant damage resulting from conflicts in their past, such as the Allen-White School campus. Recognizing the

significance of the remaining architecture and the painful arson attacks that are embedded in the layers AW’s complex history would perhaps allow new meaning to emerge in ECHO’s conservation efforts, one that brings to light the narrative of community resilience in the wake of violence through a preservation treatment approach.

Option Three: Rehabilitating a Campus

The SOI treatment approaches discussed thus far have only addressed potential options for the 1920 Dorris Hall building on Allen-White’s campus. While the ruin is certainly the most historically significant structure remaining, and in dire need of attention, locals in Whiteville have focused their efforts almost exclusively on its conservation, rather than on conserving the extant 1964 elementary school at its north. It could be argued that with their current conservation plan to reconstruct Dorris Hall, ECHO is perhaps overlooking the campus’s most important asset in the elementary school building, a resource that the community already has access to as a potential interpretive space. Despite several decades of deferred maintenance and vandalism to its interior, the extant elementary school is currently in better shape than the original Rosenwald brick building. Its presence on campus is not an anomaly, but rather a significant part of AW’s heritage that is directly linked to the school’s tangible built environment. Since it was built in 1964, the elementary school building has gained significance in its own right, both as an example of mid-century institutional architecture and for its association with Black education in the South during the Civil Rights Era. For these reasons, the community might consider the SOI rehabilitation treatment approach to capitalize on the building’s presence as a functional space on campus.

Because it is the most common SOI treatment approach, a multitude of case study examples that demonstrate successful rehabilitation projects can be found around the world. “Adaptive use” projects—as the treatment has become known in the linguistic vernacular—have the ability to transform historic buildings into sites of new purpose for various commercial, residential, and social uses while still retaining their cultural value and architectural character defining features. One such example is the Administration-Clock Tower Building located in Chicago’s Pullman Historic District (District), which, like Allen-White, has suffered the effects of arson. The building is one of many historically significant extant buildings situated within the District, which is historically significant as the first planned industrial community in the United
States. It was developed by railroad tycoon George Pullman for his Pullman Company industrial complex beginning in 1880. The District also gained significance in 1894 when railroad workers went on strike to combat high rents and low wages in the Pullman community, an event that became known as the Pullman Strike. After several years of local heritage activism, the District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the 1960s. Later, serious plans to rehabilitate the Pullman community took root in the 1990s. In 2015, after several conservation projects, the Pullman Historic District was designated a national monument by President Barack Obama and fell under the authority of the NPS for visitor interpretation.

The Administration-Clock Tower Building was among the first buildings constructed in the Pullman community in 1880. Also known as the Administration and Factory Complex, the building functioned as the high-style manufacturing center for the Pullman Company. In 1998, the building was seriously damaged by an arson fire, and local politicians took immediate action to stabilize and rehabilitate the building. Led by Illinois Governor George H. Ryan and Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley, a task force was created in 1999 to assess the damage to the site and lead the community process for the building’s stabilization. The Pullman Factory Task Force included local residents, heritage conservationists, economic development specialists, and other civic leaders.

Following their report on best practices, Governor Ryan granted $10 million in funds to contribute to the stabilization and rehabilitation work on the Administration-Clock Tower Building, which is still ongoing with financial help from the NPS. Once completed, the building will serve as the National Park Service’s visitor center and museum exhibition space for the Pullman State Historic Site. The choice to rehabilitate the damaged Administration-Clock Tower Building will conserve the building’s surviving architectural features and monumental presence within the Pullman community, while at the same create a source of revenue for the District by offering a new space for public interpretation and interaction with the heritage of the monument site as a District.348

The 1964 elementary school on AW’s campus offers similar adaptive use possibilities should the Whiteville community choose the rehabilitation approach. The most important step in this type of project would first be to stabilize the Dorris Hall building to prevent any further decay. Then, conservation plans would shift to focus on the 1964 facility by using the funds ECHO has already raised to rehabilitate the elementary school building to includes spaces like modern vocational classrooms, community meeting halls, an interpretive museum exhibit, or even a tourist visitor’s center akin to Pullman’s Administration-Clock Tower Building, all of which would contribute to the vision for the Allen-White Center for Education and Cultural Advancement. Furthermore, the choice to first rehabilitate the elementary school would generate revenue through sources like public admissions fees and school tuition to support future conservation projects on campus.

Rehabilitating Allen-White’s elementary school building also offers immediate benefits when it comes to the community’s relationship and potential partnerships with city and county planning agencies. ECHO has already conducted a historic resources survey of AW’s campus during its 2005 National Register nomination process, a pivotal step in grassroots heritage planning for vacant or underutilized properties such as AW that may be at risk of decay or demolition. Conducting a historic resources survey involves not only the constituent community, but also engages other local stakeholders and the public with the architecture of a historic site. These historic asset inventories are typically used to support government decision making, and in Allen-White’s case, may be a “catalyst for economic growth,” according to urban planning scholar Jennifer Minner, that can “enhance [the site’s] real estate value, contribute to state and local economies, influence the location of businesses, and encourage heritage tourism.”

A rehabilitation project on AW’s campus would be mutually beneficial for state agencies as well, allowing the government to profit from increased property tax revenue generated from the campus and reduced social costs like vandalism and other crimes that “strain the resources of local police, fire, building, and health departments” on abandoned sites like Allen-White’s campus in its current state. Moreover, a partnership between Whiteville’s planning agency and

---

the local Black community would create an opportunity to make reparations for the State’s racialized wrongdoings of the past through a collective effort to widen “preservation’s sphere of engagement to focus on underserved and excluded groups.” By establishing an “equity preservation agenda,” the local government can allocate resources to imply “the potential for greater equity in terms of whose histories are emphasized” in Hardeman County.352

Option Four: A Combined Treatment Approach

A combined treatment approach is perhaps the ideal strategy to address Allen-White’s conservation needs. The previous sections provided options for each individual building using the reconstruction, preservation, and rehabilitation SOI approaches, but a combination of two or more of the Standards to address both Dorris Hall and the elementary school facility together would probably best represent the relationship between the two extant architectural resources, and allow AW to reaffirm its presence as a cohesive school campus in Hardeman County. This type of approach gives the Whiteville community the ability to create a greater campuswide landscape that would renew not just the buildings, but the surrounding school grounds as well. Furthermore, a combination of the SOI treatments to address both historic resources as one united place may create an opportunity to establish a historic district similar to the Pullman District in Chicago, which could help restore a sense of place to the School’s tangible built environment for the Allen-White community.

In a more radical combined treatment approach, heritage conservationists, architects, and local community leaders chose to combine the preservation and reconstruction SOI treatments to conserve the Menokin plantation in Warsaw, Virginia. They deemed the approach “dynamic preservation,” and the goal of the project is to “present a transparent view into the social, political, and economic forces” that shaped Menokin’s past as a plantation in the eighteenth century American South. The property was originally built and owned by founding father Francis Lightfoot Lee, and served as a tobacco plantation with enslaved labor in Virginia’s Tidewater Region. By the end of the twentieth century, the house had fallen into a state of disrepair when local heritage advocates purchased it for conservation.

The “Glass House Project,” which is currently underway at Menokin, strives to balance the two chosen SOI treatment approaches to tell a comprehensive story of the site as both a

352 Minner, “Revealing Synergies,” 80.
prominent example of western architecture, as well as a site of conscience that recounts the
country’s institution of enslavement that made these architectural relics possible. The project
first implements the preservation approach by stabilizing and maintaining the original fabric of
the neo-Palladian building, about eighty percent of which survived after a tree fell on the house
and the building partially collapsed in the 1960s. Next, conservationists aim to reconstruct the
collapsed parts of the ruin’s built environment by encasing the reconstructed “guts” of the
original house with a glass shell exterior that starkly contrasts the home’s original sandstone,
white oak, and pine materials. The combined approach will allow visitors to experience the
remains of the house in its preserved state, while also giving them the opportunity to interpret the
reconstructed building with a new conservation design approach that, in the words of project
engineer James O’Callahan, “literally gives a transparent view of history and of the art and
science of construction.” In future years, project leaders hope to implement the rehabilitation
Standard for other historic buildings at Menokin, and will potentially add a visitors center and
museum space to the five hundred acre landscape.

A “dynamic preservation” approach would suit the extant AW buildings as well. ECHO
might choose to preserve the Dorris Hall ruin in its current state to stand alone like at
Hiroshima’s Genbaku Dome, or potentially with a glass-clad reconstruction for visitors to
interact with, similar to Menokin’s strategy. The community may even consider encapsulating
the building’s remains for interpretation at a distance, as was the case with the clock tower at
Berlin’s Gedächtniskirche. Simultaneously, local leaders can rehabilitate the elementary school
building into a functional space that houses vocational training programs for the Allen-White
Center for Education and Cultural Advancement, and possibly even add a contextual building
addition per the SOI rehabilitation Standard to serve as an interpretive community center and
museum exhibition space. The option to somehow connect the buildings also exists, thus
creating a multi-functional interpretive, educational, and social space that creates new uses on
campus and also represents the School community’s resiliency and pride within the built
environment. A project like this would likely require multiple phases to accomplish the long-

house-project-begins-construction-at-the-menokin-foundation.
355 Grimmer, The Standards, 75-153; Tyler et al., Historic Preservation, 204-206.
term goal of a cohesive campus landscape, and more financial capital to complete the design would certainly be necessary.

A combined treatment approach would be well worth the multifaceted complexities of the project because it would allow AW’s new campus design to thrive by utilizing a significant community planning strategy called “placemaking.” The tool seeks to capture the unique value of a place for commercial, economic, and social development by creating a sense of belonging through human and spatial relationships. Heritage theorist James Michael Buckley argues that, in the field of heritage conservation, placemaking is an excellent design tool to address the histories of underrepresented populations “in ways that traditional interpretations have not—that is, using the locations where minority culture is produced to strengthen community bonds.” According to Buckley, placemaking, as an aesthetic approach, has the ability to enact identities that are embedded in the physical and social fabric of a place, and is therefore able to heighten a sense of belonging “through an expression of historical connections and relationships,” especially for ethnic cultural communities such as the Black neighborhood within which Allen-White’s campus is situated. Placemaking projects often include design elements like public art works, street furniture installations, and landscape plantings that promote togetherness and invoke these “community bonds.” With a combined treatment approach to address AW’s campus as a whole, the Whiteville community can incorporate some of these placemaking elements to activate the campus as a renewed space that strengthens the identity of the community and renews its physical built environment for future, long-term use.356

The Problem with Integrity

Regardless of which treatment option the Allen-White community ultimately chooses, the broader issue of building integrity will certainly play a role in their conservation plan. According to the SOI Standards, the importance of any eligible property must be evaluated based on its historic or architectural integrity to determine how well it represents the period or thematic context for which it is being recognized, or its “ability to convey its significance.” Integrity has become an important part of assessing historic buildings since the passage of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, a landmark piece of legislation that established the National Register

of Historic Places and its original standards for the conservation of historic properties. So much so that integrity often becomes a make or break condition for properties getting listed on the local, state, or National Register. In order to be listed as historic, a property must meet “several” or “usually most” of the seven “aspects of integrity,” which include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.  

Like the connection between a property’s authenticity and significance, the relationship between its integrity and significance are very much intertwined and heavily emphasized in the current SOI Standards for conserving the tangible built environment. But the issue of integrity has also become a topic of much debate in the heritage field in recent years. As is the case in the debate over authenticity, heritage professionals have come to realize that the scope of the SOI’s aspects of integrity is far too limiting, reliant almost exclusively on determinations of architectural quality, along with physical evidence, to support heritage value. Although the designation criteria and integrity requirements do make room for consideration of cultural heritage with aspects like feeling and association, their presence is often not enough to secure protection for a site without the support of the other aspects that relate directly to the tangible built environment, such as design or materials. Because of these limitations, many professionals now argue that the current requirements for landmarking in the United States disregard a broader concept of significance, one that reflects the cultural importance of historic places that is inherently represented through their intangible characteristics. Heritage scholars Doris J. Dyen and Edward K. Muller agree with this changing attitude toward integrity, especially when it comes to the evolutionary nature of conservation interpretation as places gain significance over time. They note that “historical significance depends on historical interpretation, which is by nature changing over time.”

Although some communities are more liberal than others regarding what aspects constitute integrity for local nomination, the field’s hyper fixation on architectural integrity presents an even greater problem when it comes to an equitable representation of heritage. Measuring heritage value via physical attributes has allowed conservationists to maintain a

---


Eurocentric view of what sites are worthy of designation. This is a selective pattern that heritage conservation theorist Sybille Frank regards as the intrinsic “nationalization of bourgeois property as heritage.” By emphasizing a site’s physical prestige and prominence, the heritage industry has created a detrimental framework for nomination that underscores exclusion and discrimination, especially toward racialized or social groups who’s heritage sites fail to meet the traditional evaluative criteria to retain historic significance due to a lack of architectural integrity. As Dyen and Muller point out:

…the properties of a more inclusive history seem to be especially vulnerable to the processes of land use change in a capitalistic society. Properties of less-advantaged social groups and those with declining activity due to economic disinvestment, for example, frequently experience land use turnover and serious alteration or even obliteration. Are such properties no longer worth recognition despite their historical significance?

The issue of integrity is compounded by the fact that many communities do not have the financial and bureaucratic resources needed to maintain historic sites per the requirements set forth by the Standards, and so have a difficult time obtaining government protection. As heritage scholar Jackson Loop explains, “this leaves certain stories and their potential for memory work completely unrecognized, or worse, erased.” Thankfully, problems with the current nomination framework have surfaced in recent years as the disproportionate number of high-style buildings listed on the National and local registers have illuminated the fact that government methods are failing to protect underrepresented heritage sites that convey meaning in other ways besides their architecture. As a result, more heritage professionals are recognizing and advocating for an expanded definition of integrity, one that places more emphasis on intangible aspects of heritage like feeling and association that better represent the

---

362 The NPS reported in 2010 that only eight percent of the 86,000 listings on the National Register for Historic Places were associated with people of color or women, a shockingly low number of sites representing two of many underrecognized groups in the United States that helped galvanize the movement toward increased inclusivity in the heritage field. Stephanie Meeks, “A More Perfect Union: Towards a More Inclusive History, and a Preservation Movement That Looks Like America,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, Hampton University, March 30, 2015.
historic significance of these important places. Despite these efforts, there is still much to be done to move the needle in the right direction.\textsuperscript{363}

The Allen-White School campus presents one opportunity for the heritage field to overlook architectural preeminence and instead focus on its intangible significance as a place of meaning for the Black community in Whiteville. Prior to the 2012 arson, Dorris Hall retained enough integrity of design and materials to secure its place on the National and Tennessee Registers. At the time of nomination in 2005, the 1964 elementary school building was regarded as a non-contributor and therefore was not designated.\textsuperscript{364} After the fire reduced Dorris Hall to a ruin, the original Rosenwald building lost a significant amount of architectural integrity, so much so that had it been nominated for the NR after the tragic attack, the building would likely have failed to secure protection based on the current nomination criteria. But as critics of the integrity requirement have noted, this does not diminish AW’s cultural significance and the sense of place it creates for former students, teachers, and families of Hardeman County’s first Black consolidated public school.

Even though the original building has lost integrity, AW’s campus is still deserving of conservation, especially at a time when the local community is mobilized and ready to break the intellectual and political barriers of conservation that so often exclude underrecognized heritage sites from designation and protection.\textsuperscript{365} Furthermore, the community deserves the opportunity to maintain a symbiotic relationship with the campus, instead of one that is frozen in time based on a set of “character-defining features” outlined at a particular moment in time when Dorris Hall was originally designated.\textsuperscript{366} With support from state and local legislators as well as capital investment from partnering organizations, ECHO will certainly be able to conserve the Allen-

\textsuperscript{363} Dyen and Muller, “Conserving the Heritage,” 1994; Tyler et al., \textit{Historic Preservation}, 327-328.
\textsuperscript{364} West, “Allen-White School,” section 7, page 1. The choice not to nominate the 1964 elementary school building in 2005 was likely due to its failure to meet the “fifty year rule,” an SOI Standard under criterion G that requires properties to be at least fifty years in age to be nominated, unless they are otherwise “exceptionally important.” At the time of writing, the building has now surpassed fifty years, and would likely be eligible for nomination. For more information about the fifty year rule see: \textit{National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation} (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1990 (rev. 1991, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2002)): 41-43.

\textsuperscript{365} For more information on the intellectual barriers and other obstacles created by the heritage industry that bar underrepresented communities from obtaining designation, the work of heritage scholar Jackson Loop has proven exceptionally insightful: Jackson Loop, “It’s important to remember what started it”: Conserving Sites and Stories of Racial Violence in Los Angeles, 1943-1992,” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 2020).

White School however they best see fit for the campus landscape and the community’s needs, regardless of which SOI treatment option they ultimately choose. But there are other avenues for conserving the School’s intangible heritage that the community should consider while the reconstruction project remains ongoing. The following section outlines the broader context of the changing heritage discourse, and gives examples of other methodologies the AW community can use to represent collective memory in ways that architectural conservation cannot.

**Alternative Approaches to Protect Intangible Heritage**

*The Production of Space and an Expanded Heritage Discourse*

The rising debates over authenticity and integrity lead to a greater conversation emerging in the heritage industry about what really defines historic significance, and how the relationship between people, space, and place contribute to a site’s importance. Centered around intangible heritage, the discussion prompts conservation professionals, architects, and advocates of the built environment to think beyond the physical space of architecture and instead about the relationship between people and their attachment to place based on memory and feeling. The push for an expanded dialogue has predominately been led by heritage, planning, and anthropology scholars Setha Low, Laurajane Smith, Dolores Hayden, David Lowenthal, and a few others. Their growing body of work seeks to criticizes traditional methods of heritage conservation when it comes to handling the histories of social and racialized groups that have been overlooked by the field’s current construct. Ultimately, their goal is to establish a new and enlarged framework for the practice, one that no longer represents a selective memory of the past that often avoids these groups entirely.

Anthropologist Setha Low calls the relationship between each of these factors—people, space, and place—the “social construction” of space and place, which is defined by “the transformations and contestations that occur through peoples’ social interactions, memories, feelings, imaginings, and daily use—or lack thereof—that are made into places, scenes, and action that convey particular meanings.” For example, during their time at the Allen-White School campus, community members “socially construct[ed]” and communicated local meanings through symbolic cultural forms and practices such as music (i.e., chorus concerts, the minstrel show), dance, sports, food (pies struts and picnics), religion, clubs, and other recreational activities. The spatial appropriation between the place that is AW’s campus and a group of Black
community members that were unwelcomed elsewhere in Hardeman County “create[d] unexpected forms of placemaking and inscriptions of meaning” that are inherently imbedded in the School community’s intangible cultural heritage. 367 But the “meanings” created by one or many combinations of these factors are not conveyed equitably in modern society, as this paper has detailed with regard to aspects of the tangible built environment like authenticity and integrity. The problem of ignoring underrepresented histories and even erasing them exists within the social construct of intangible heritage as well, as the current framework almost always yields biases, prejudices, and inequalities predicated on power relations embedded in race, class, and gender. 368

Heritage critic Laurajane Smith analyzes these power imbalances in her book Uses of Heritage, citing expertise and exclusivity as motivators for the westernized approach to heritage conservation. Like Low, Smith regards the relationship between people and places a “construction” of social “values and understandings,” which ultimately make up the idea of heritage as a “cultural practice.” The “practice” is thus dictated by what she describes as the “authorized heritage discourse” or AHD, a “hegemonic” rhetoric formulated by the West that “naturalizes certain narratives and cultural and social experiences” most often “linked to and defined by the concepts of monumentality and aesthetics.” Since its inception as a field of study, the “construction” of heritage has inherently omitted the intangible collective memory of underrepresented populations based on its own design. 369 Thus, the narrow scope of the AHD contributes to “othering,” a process by which the heritage of underrecognized communities is placed in binary opposition to that of mainstream society. This “either and or” approach, as described by heritage theorist Sybille Frank, forces underrecognized groups to assimilate, or excludes them from the discourse entirely. 370 David Lowenthal—a forefather of heritage studies—challenges the existing dichotomy with his assertion that regardless of social, economic, political, or ethnic factors, “people the world over refer to aspects of their heritage in the same way.” 371

368 Low, Spatializing Culture, 68-69.
370 Frank, Wall Memorials, 73.
Smith argues that moving forward, heritage professionals must work to expand the AHD to eradicate “otherness” and be more inclusive of underrepresented communities who find themselves “[placed] outside of it.” Recognizing its governing authority in the field of heritage studies and management, she writes that “the AHD as a source of political power has the ability to facilitate the marginalization of groups who cannot make successful appeals to or control the expression of master cultural or social narratives” based on the expertise currently required by the field to obtain heritage recognition and protection. Furthermore, Smith disputes the whole idea of an “assimilationist and top-down” approach to heritage, where professionals are encouraged to recruit underrepresented communities into existing practices. Instead, a “bottom-up” approach would better challenge underlying preconceptions and power relations within the heritage field through community negotiation and involvement in decision making processes.\(^\text{372}\)

Urban and heritage theorist Delores Hayden echoes this sentiment in her landmark book *The Power of Place*, where she asserts that fluid communication is key among local communities, practitioners, scholars, planners, architects, and others involved in heritage projects to recover aspects of intangible public memory, especially for underrecognized groups. Her thoughts center around the “power of place,” which represents the intrinsic connection between public space within ordinary landscapes and the collective memories that comprise a community’s “politics of identity.” Although Hayden’s work is focused on the relationship between space, place, and people in urban environments, her ideas are easily translated to represent those living in rural landscapes as well, who similarly foster a sense of “place attachment” based on social relationships that are “intertwined” with spatial perception.

The Allen-White campus, for example, represents a rural “working landscape,” spaces that Hayden describes are shaped for both economic production and social reproduction. In AW’s case, a county training school campus with spaces specifically designed to create industrial job opportunities for working class citizens (i.e., the trade department shop and the agriculture fields), and that includes social spaces like housing, a chapel, and recreational facilities too. Working landscapes like Allen-White’s have scarcely been examined by the heritage field because of their relationship with underrecognized working class groups, and

therefore offer an opportunity for conservationists to make meaningful associations between the social history and production of space in these understudied places.\(^{373}\)

The efforts to conserve Allen-White’s campus represent the expanding nature of the AHD bolstered by each of these heritage critics, one that creates an even playing field between heritage professionals and the constituent community with a “bottom-up” grassroots approach. When ECHO first sought professional conservation advice, the community had already begun organizing to raise funds for Dorris Hall’s reconstruction. Moreover, according to architectural historian Carroll Van West, MTSU’S Center for Historic Preservation approaches every project from the local perspective by offering pro bono work “that allows the community to control the project at every step.”\(^{374}\) According to Jackson Loop, progressive heritage projects such as the one ongoing in Whiteville allow underrecognized communities to “circumnavigate the problems of expertise and exclusion” embedded within the AHD, which “can help in fights for social and spatial justice.”\(^{375}\)

This is especially true of intangible cultural heritage, which is just as, if not more important than conserving tangible architectural assets to create a long-lasting historic record for sites like Allen-White that fall outside of the traditional AHD.\(^{376}\) Although the discourse is shifting more and more to include non-mainstream narratives, there will always be those that are too “politically charged or shameful” for governments to support or expose, such as enslavement and the subsequent racialized discrimination and hostility southern Black communities experienced during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Eras that the American government still fails to fully acknowledge from the victims’ perspective today. Therefore, the AW community should continue to take control of protecting their own intangible heritage in addition to the School’s built environment, especially after the campus lost a significant amount of structural integrity as a result of the last arson attack in 2012. Doing so would immortalize the story of the Allen-White School—in all its layers of success, pride, conflict, and resilience—while at the same time help reshape the AHD by breaking the status quo of an expert controlled heritage process in favor of a community-led approach.\(^{377}\) But for unrecognized histories to be refocused at the center of the


\(^{374}\) Carroll Van West, email message to author, December 8, 2022.

\(^{375}\) Loop, “It’s important,” 11-12, 14.

\(^{376}\) Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 264-265.

\(^{377}\) Loop, “It’s important,” 11-12, 14.
heritage dialogue, “it is necessary to explore alternative and new methods of understanding oral and ritual models of cultural transmission, in addition to thinking more about interactions,” as Frank implores. This shift will inevitably help the field come to an “as well as” conceptualization of heritage, rather than the traditional “either and or” binary approach. Some of these useful methods for conserving intangible heritage, both qualitative and digital, are outlined below.

*Qualitative Methods for Heritage Conservation*

Like others housed within the social sciences, the heritage field has long been dominated by research methods that quantify people and places based on their numeric or descriptive value. Quantitative research methods like surveys and ranking systems that are based on variables and established criterion—like that of the National Register nomination process—provide a fundamental framework to inform conservationists and help them make exacting decisions about the tangible built environment based on findings represented in the data. For example, in 2005, the City of Los Angeles began a citywide survey of 880,000 legal parcels in partnership with the Getty Foundation to protect and enhance its valuable historic resources. SurveyLA, as the project is known, was a decade-long undertaking and ultimately created the most comprehensive urban historic resources survey in the United States. The findings of SurveyLA have since informed planners, historians, and heritage professionals of significant architectural details and historic contexts unique to Los Angeles based on numeric and descriptive data points collected during the survey.

Spatial data and statistical analysis like those used in SurveyLA are certainly important factors to expand the AHD. Heritage scholars Brent Leggs, Jenna Dublin, and Michael Power point out their ability to “highlight opportunities for preservationists to address racial disparities in historic designation and reimagine preservation practice as a force supporting strong communities rich with culture and opportunity.”

---

378 Frank, *Wall Memorials*, pg. 73.

SurveyLA provide necessary input to conserve important historic resources, they do little to protect intangible heritages that are less adept to exact measurement.³⁸⁰

To truly shift away from westernized exclusivity and expand the AHD, heritage professionals must broaden their research methods for determining a site’s historic significance and designation status to also include qualitative data collection methods for intangible heritage. Qualitative research, as defined by research theorists Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world.” Instead of numbers and variables, it consists of a set of “interpretive, material practices that make the world visible….by attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” Unlike quantitative data collection, qualitative research centers on the use of empirical materials to interpret the world and its connection to people. “Case studies, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, cultural texts and productions” as well as “field notes, conversations, photographs, recordings, performances, and memos” are all means by which researchers can “turn the world into a series of representations” across historical fields.³⁸¹

This is certainly true of the heritage conservation field, where qualitative research methods are especially useful in representing underrecognized or forgotten heritage. Empirical materials such as those listed above are invaluable tools to help these communities promote their identity politics and collective memories that can only be conveyed intangibly. Moreover, qualitative research methods have the ability to shed light on concepts of equity and social justice in the broader contexts of public history and urban planning that numeric values simply cannot convey on an emotional level. Several different types of qualitative materials were collected and used to interpret the intangible place-based heritage of the Allen-White School community during the research phase of this project, three of which are outlined below: oral histories, ephemera, and mental maps. They represent only a few of many methods pertaining to what heritage scholars Allison Arlotta and Erica Avrami call “memory work” that can be used to

interpret and convey the intangible heritages of underrepresented communities whose stories fall outside the current heritage discourse.\textsuperscript{382}

Perhaps the most effective qualitative research method to capture and express intangible heritage is oral history interviews. Heritage practitioners and institutions are beginning to find more value in long-form interviews with primary subjects to support claims of historic significance during the nomination process, a move which represents the slowly shifting AHD away from rigid criterion premised on objective, evidence-based chains of reasoning and instead toward meaning-making and understanding place attachment based on narrative interpretation. This is an ongoing movement, however, because it requires heritage professionals to gain trust in the legitimacy of oral histories as supporting data, and to “concede some of the privilege gained through the power/knowledge claims of expertise.”\textsuperscript{383}

But by accepting oral histories as viable source materials, heritage professionals have the ability to shift existing historic narratives back to the perspective of less recognized populations. According to heritage theorists Leggs, Dublin, and Power, first-hand knowledge expressed via oral histories that are derived from people’s interactions with specific places and physical landmarks “can challenge dominant narratives in terms of who is most entitled to occupy places and who knows best what the future of the area should be.”\textsuperscript{384} They have the power to create a “shared authority” that gives agency back to underrepresented communities to define their own public histories.\textsuperscript{385} Therefore, because stories are documented and preserved as recordings or written texts, oral histories are by default an act of heritage management and an incredibly useful qualitative material that can be used to maintain difficult or underrecognized histories.\textsuperscript{386}

In 2004, photographer and historian Ann Smithwick embarked on a project to record the images and narratives of former Rosenwald school students in her native West Tennessee. Smithwick became inspired by the Rosenwald Fund’s rural schools program when in 1994 she and her family made their home in a rehabilitated Rosenwald schoolhouse once known as the Braden-Sinai School in Fayette County, which is situated just west of Hardeman County.

\textsuperscript{385} Hayden, \textit{Power of Place}, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{386} Smith, \textit{Uses of Heritage}, 46.
Smithwick suddenly found herself surrounded by a vibrant local Black community in her new rural neighborhood, where nostalgia for the school days was alive and thriving. “Many of our neighbors were students and teachers at the school,” she recounts, “…they often dropped by and shared their recollections with us. This schoolhouse was clearly an important part of their lives, and they have sentimental memories of their days spent there.”

Smithwick recognized the need to record her neighbors’ intangible collective memories, so she began to take their portraits and collect an oral history archive of interviews with each subject. The project quickly expanded to other surrounding Rosenwald schools communities, including that of the Allen-White School. By 2005, Smithwick had interviewed and photographed approximately forty former Rosenwald students, twenty-six of whom attended AW. (Figure 4.6, Figure 4.7) Their stories were exhibited as part of her project titled Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders, which ran at the National Civil Rights Museum in partnership with the Ford Foundation in Memphis, Tennessee in 2007. Notable guests included Evelyn C. Robertson of the AW community, Rosenwald historian Mary S. Hoffschwelle of MTSU, and writer Peter M. Ascoli, grandson of Julius Rosenwald. According to Whiteville leader Evelyn C. Robertson, the exposure helped motivate the local community to form ECHO and take more active steps to conserve the School’s campus.

Figures 4.6 & 4.7: Portraits of Jesse Norment ’46 (left) and sisters Ruby ’45 and Mabel ’40 Andrews ca. 2005, photographed by Ann Smithwick. Courtesy of Smithwick, Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders photography and oral history project.

In preparation for this thesis project, I was able to reconnect with the Allen-White community and build upon Smithwick’s original collection of oral histories. Eight additional accounts were recorded, all of which reflect the layered history of AW as both a championed institution for Black education and a post-conflict site of conscience. Although the 2012 arson attack added a new layer to AW’s history that was only captured in the more recent oral histories, the stories of the School and its importance to the Whiteville community remained the same almost two decades after the first group of students were interviewed. This phenomenon represents the power of place-based collective memories to invoke a sense of cultural identity as landscapes change over time, especially for underrepresented communities like Whiteville’s who rely on intangible heritage rather than architectural sites to tell the story of place and embodied space.390

The predominant theme that emerged in oral history interviews with former AW students in 2005 and 2022 was community pride. Students who graduated between 1942-1970 reflected on campus facilities, programs, teachers and staff, and the School’s place in the greater Hardeman County society with a sense of dignity and appreciation for its accomplishments at a time when Black southerners were regarded as second class citizens. They had particularly fond memories of social events like the annual Thanksgiving rally, field days, talent shows, and others that took place in various spaces on campus. Of the annual field day festivities, Ernest Tisdale ’66 had fond memories:

Oh man, oh man. All the schools in the rural areas, Grand Junction, Hickory Valley, Toone…all around, these little, small community schools, all of them would come to Allen-White, and we’d have field day. And we’d have all the things…the sack thing, wheel barrel races, high jump…I would go to bed the night before field day, and I’d be so excited I could hardly sleep. [It] was a day that everybody came together…It was just fun.

Almost all of the campus events included a fundraising component to support AW’s various construction projects. Patricia Crisp, who was part of AW’s last graduating class in 1970, recollected the omnipresent PTA fundraising efforts that became a tradition at the School’s inception:

I can remember the PTA being a very active organization at the time, providing funds and things for the children that otherwise we wouldn’t have gotten. And my grandmom and

Students also recollected classes held in AW’s education buildings and remembered socializing in outdoor spaces. Those who attended Allen-White during the height of its fundraising years in the 1940s and 1940s recounted the various buildings on campus and their memories of the spaces constructed and embodied by students of the National Youth Organization (NYA). According to former student and teacher Mabel Andrews ’40, it was because of the NYA program that the School “got to look like a little college.” Beatrice Spencer ’42 reminisced on her time working for AW’s NYA program:

Each month we had a new duty list. Your job would change. And we would end up with twelve dollars a month to go to school. We had a sandwich shop here, we had a dining room. So I worked in the dining room and cooked for the teachers…Some waited tables, some washed dishes, some worked in the laundry, some were doing the ironing for the boys. It was just the girls. The boys, they were doing carpentry…Allen-White was just booming…I still remember those days. I just learned so much.

Jesse Norment ’43 regarded the NYA years as the most “intriguing” part of attending Allen-White because of his exposure to students from other parts of Tennessee and neighboring states. “That kind of experience,” he summarized, “you can’t buy at a picture show.”

The relationship between the trade and agriculture department facilities and their students became clear through the oral histories collected in each session as well. “We did a lot outside,” remembered Johnny Shaw ’69, who currently serves as a State Assembly Member in the Tennessee House of Representatives. “we always had to identify the tools we were going to use. That was very important. We had to identify seeds, we had to identify certain kind of flowers and plants and all those things.” Similarly, Odell Greene reflected on the spaces he interacted with as a student and how they were integrated into AW’s curriculum:

“…right behind the brick building was the agricultural building. [Classes were] upstairs on the second floor. The apartment down below was the trade center, and to the right was a

---

393 Johnny Shaw, interviewed by the author, Whiteville, Tennessee, October 14, 2022.
storage center. So, we did things like build furniture, plant crops, hands on things…’applied science.’ In fact, we had summer projects sometimes, I remember. Like you had an acre of land that you took care of…you were required to make all the decisions…keep a record of what you did on that land, and I enjoyed doing that because I wanted to be a farmer one day.”

Overall, students spoke highly of AW’s outdoor spaces like the playgrounds and fields. Perhaps more than anywhere else on campus, they represent the social construction of space for leisure and recreation activities, and sometimes even served as temporary classrooms while other buildings were under construction. “I think lunch times were kind of special for me because I got a chance to really gather with my friends who were not necessarily in the classroom with me,” said Shaw in his 2022 interview, “and I can remember sitting on the steps at lunchtime waiting for my friends to come from other classes and we would go out underneath the tree and sit, especially on warm days, and have our lunch. You know, little picnic lunches.”

Female students also spoke highly of the industrial training spaces at Allen-White. They particularly praised Mrs. Myrtle Robertson, AW’s longtime home economics teacher, and the knowledge she imparted to them in campus spaces like the kitchen, laundry, and home economics classrooms. “She was our home in the kitchen,” described Cosette Crawford ‘67, “[she] said things that stuck with me there.” For example, remembering the sewing classes with Mrs. Robertson, Hugholene Robertson ’54 recalled that:

She wouldn’t allow you to wear pins in your clothes. You had to sew it, or take it up, or fix it where you wouldn’t need to wear pins in your clothes. Every time now that I’m going to put a pin in something I’m going to wear, I think about her.

Edna Dotson ‘65 harkened back to the fun she had in Mrs. Robertson’s class, remembering “One funny thing in her class…during the fall, when we would prepare preserves, we’d get to sneak pears out of the classroom and give it to our friends. So I enjoyed home economics.”

Across almost all interviewees, “Cheek Hall is remembered as the centerpiece of the Allen-White campus.”

---

394 Odell Greene, interviewed by the author, Whiteville, Tennessee, October 14, 2022.
395 In his 2005 interview, Willie Jerry Rhodes recalls having first grade classes in the girls’ softball dugout in 1964 while the new elementary school building was still under construction. Willie Jerry Rhodes, interviewed by Ann Smithwick on November 17, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
396 Shaw interview, 2022.
Gilbert Hall—consisted of a cafeteria, a library, a gymnasium that doubled as an auditorium, and high school classrooms. Cheek Hall remained the largest building on campus until it burned in 1971. Collectively, students recalled the cafeteria being the campus’s central gathering point. Several interviewees recollected the notorious meals prepared by dietician Pearl Robertson, including Hugholene Robertson ’54, whose thoughts are reminiscent of the close-knit Black community in Whiteville: “We ate at the cafeteria. My husband’s mother, Mrs. Pearl Robertson, was the main cook at the cafeteria. They really served delicious meals; the food was so delicious. She was a really good cook.” Others underscored the value of a hot meal at school, which was seen as a luxury to many of the lesser income students from sharecropping families:

…lunch was twenty-five cents…we were so poor, sometimes we couldn’t afford the twenty-five cents for lunch, so we had to bring peanut butter crackers. But then somewhere down the line I was able to get a job at the cafeteria because if you worked in the cafeteria, you got your lunch free. It was good. We had good, planned meals, which was good. It was good for us, ‘cause I would imagine back in those days, many children didn’t get a wholesome meal at home.

Cleaster Sain ’65

The library in Cheek Hall was also important to the students’ construction of space on campus and its connection to their identities as students, especially those who sought to learn outside of the classroom or continue their studies at the collegiate level after graduating AW. Ocie Holmes ’63 remembered spending free time in the library with friends:

We would go to the library, but you know you have to be really quiet…Mrs. Pratt was the librarian. She was the greatest. She taught us about Black History Month…[She] is the one who would bring us all the pictures and tell us about the heritage and just make sure we knew our culture. She was a great librarian. 398

Charles Johnson ’65 also spent a great deal of time in the library:

…because the librarian would have all of the latest publications from the newspaper to magazines, and there would be classes there, but there would be an area whereby you could check out a book on current events. And that was important to me at that time. 399

A particular point of community pride among former Allen-White students was the School’s athletic program, which took place in the Cheek Hall gymnasium beginning in 1948. The gym was almost every subject’s favorite place on campus because it was home to the Allen-White Bears basketball teams, which was the most popular sports team on campus. According to

Odell Greene, it had a regulation sized floor, bleachers, men and women’s locker rooms, a stage for performances, and dressing rooms. In his 2005 interview, Jesse Rhodes ’55 reflected on the sense of pride he felt in the basketball teams:

The basketball team used to win state championships and all that. The state championships were held at Tennessee State University. And when I was a student [at Allen-White], they put these banners up for the state tournament [in the gym], you know, and I would see Allen-White up there saying we won it for several years. So, I would tell other kids from the feeder schools that that was my school. I went there!400

Only a few students that were interviewed in 2005 and 2022 attended Allen-White from elementary school all the way through high school. But of this small group, former students remembered the chapel services and choral concerts that took place in the 1964 elementary school building, as well as the entry way, cloakrooms, and the stoves and small wood furniture for the children in each classroom.401 Lois Harris ’63 remembered being “a little bit naughty,” in the halls of the elementary school, where, in her younger years at Allen-White, she would run down the building’s long central corridor, turn the lights off, and then hide from teachers.402

One unexpected finding in all of the oral histories collected is that difficult themes like segregation, otherness, conflict, and resilience barely emerged in the students’ stories. Both interviewers purposely left the questions open-ended so as not to lead subjects toward specific answers, so it is notable that these topics were hardly brought up. These themes are widely documented in written histories of the Allen-White School, primarily from the perspectives of Principal James H. White and the PTA, who likely encountered more overt instances of racialized discrimination and hostility regarding the cause for Black education during the early years of the School’s history than the sample of students interviewed in 2005 and 2022. It is possible that difficult topics were avoided because both interviewers are White, which, as oral history researcher Jan L. Peterson notes, can sometimes create an unintended “societal barrier” or “dominant paradigm” during the interview process involving subjects of a different racialized

400 Green interview, 2022; Jesse Rhodes interview, 2005. Prior to 1948, the athletics department was housed in the shared auditorium space in Dorris Hall.
401 Georgia Crowder, Jesse Rhodes, and Fredell Harris, interviewed by Ann Smithwick between November 7-29, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
402 Lois Harris, interviewed by Ann Smithwick between November 7, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
group, such as the Black community in Whiteville.¹⁰³ But for both Ann Smithwick and myself, if felt as if there was no communication blockade causing discomfort for the interviewees at Allen-White, but rather a sheer feeling of excitement and pride when given the opportunity to talk about their school days.¹⁰⁴

A few students drew comparisons between the neighboring White schools and AW, citing the difference in quality of materials and resources. For example, several students mentioned that busses only ran for White students, so they often had to walk long distances to get to AW’s campus. But as Loyce Shockley ’49 described, walking to school presented another opportunity for students to socialize: “It was fun walking when we were kids…My friends, we would all go down that road together…and we used to shoot marbles and skip rope and things like that.” Patricia Crisp ’70 remembered getting second-hand books from the White students at Whiteville High School, “…but it didn’t matter you know. A verb is a verb.”¹⁰⁵

A few other students touched on inequities they experienced that resulted from the system of White supremacy, but most of these stories took place at home. For example, some described their appreciation for the hot lunches at school because their families were unable to afford well-cooked meals at home. Other students discussed their responsibilities as children of sharecroppers and expressed their feelings of dismay and sadness over having to leave school in the fall and spring to help their families with the cotton harvest.¹⁰⁶ Former student and teacher Jesse Norment ’43 recollected memories of friends who missed a considerable amount of class each term and often fell behind because they had to work to help their families raise money to pay school fees. “Those were not the good days for Blacks,” he concluded.¹⁰⁷ But despite the fact that lesser income students often struggled at home, they felt supported at school. The teachers “made you feel so loved,” said Hugholene Robertson ’54. Juanita Morrow (graduation date unknown) credited her time at AW for the confidence it instilled within her: “The foundation I

---

¹⁰⁵ Loyce Shockley and Patricia Crisp, interviewed by Ann Smithwick on November 7-19, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
¹⁰⁷ Jesse Norment, interviewed by Ann Smithwick on November 7, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
got here helped me make it through all the trials and tribulations I’ve gone through in life.”

These responses clearly indicate that Allen-White’s campus was a safe space for students not only to get an education and partake in social activities, but to avoid the difficulties they faced at home and in other public spaces. Although most of the students’ recollections did not overtly confront themes of otherness, they unfortunately demonstrate the normalization of racialized inequity and economic suppression caused by White supremacy in the South during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Eras.

Some students addressed segregation more directly, specifically the fear, anxiety, and discomfort they felt over the process of integration, which “rolled through in about 1970” according to Ruby Andrews ’45. Students worried about the way they would be treated by their White classmates and were concerned about losing friends and the sense of community they had constructed at Allen-White. Ultimately, most students recognized the benefits of integration, as Andrews recounts: “…it helped us, but it wasn’t easy. They had to learn us and we had to learn them.”

The underlying themes of conflict and resilience that have permeated AW’s history were almost entirely un conveyed throughout the interviews, and the campus’ multiple arson attacks were only mentioned by a few subjects in 2022 when I asked about them directly. “When they told me about it,” said Fredell Harris ’66, “I just broke down. I just couldn’t see that happening to the school where people were so close.”

Instead, the subjects interviewed more recently focused their responses to questions about the arson attacks on the community’s motivation to reconstruct and rehabilitate the extant campus buildings for use as a community and museum space. “We want to preserve [Allen-White] because we want to leave a legacy for others,” said Ocie Holmes ’63, “that school meant so much to everyone, to all of us, and I just hope I’ll be living to see it materialize.”

Unfortunately, none of the students whose stories were collected had memories pertaining specifically to the original 1920 Rosenwald building Dorris Hall, beyond recognizing its

---


410 Fredell Harris interview, 2022.

411 Ocie Holmes interview, 2022.
existence as an administrative or storage space on campus. This is likely because most of the students that were interviewed by Smithwick and me attended Allen-White after Dorris Hall stopped being used as a primary education building on campus sometime during the 1940s. Unfortunately, very few students survive who attended school at AW when Dorris Hall still operated as the elementary school building. Perhaps Jesse Norment ’43 put it most succinctly: “The people who lived it, well there’s so few of us now.”

The problem of an aging AW community underscores the importance of managing heritage over time by recording intangible cultural memories to tell a comprehensive story of place. This is now especially true in Whiteville, as the stories that convey the relationship between space, place, and people in the early years of AW’s history remain critically at risk of erasure.

As is demonstrated in the oral histories recorded, Allen-White’s campus derives so much meaning from stories told by the community members who are best equipped to express its intangible cultural significance. Their accounts are important not only to claim and communicate the history of AW, but to conserve collective memories of the greater Rosenwald School context as well. Small, local repositories of oral history archives like the one in Whiteville “tend to address much smaller audiences as intimate performances of cultural continuity and identity creation.” In this case, the narratives collected in Hardeman County help create an invaluable network of qualitative materials among Rosenwald communities that tell the story of Black education across the American South. Moreover, oral histories have the power to communicate details about the built environment to help constituent communities and heritage professionals infer the historic significance and cultural meaning of places that either no longer exist or no longer retain their physical integrity, such as Allen-White. Local leader Evelyn C. Robertson ’59 recognizes the importance of oral histories and other qualitative methods to conserve AW’s intangible heritage. In his 2005 interview with Ann Smithwick, he pointed out that:

Today, this may not be that important to us. But—in twenty-five years, fifty years, sixty years from now—this going to be very significant, you know? To know that “so-and-so” went to school here. And this is who they are, and this is what their take on things [was] at that particular point. So, I see this as being something there for the future.

---

412 Jesse Norment interview, 2005.
413 Smith, Uses of Heritage, 109.
415 Evelyn C. Robertson, interviewed by Ann Smithwick on November 17, 2005 in Whiteville, Tennessee for the Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom From the Elders photography and oral history project.
Ephemera is another excellent qualitative material that helps amplify cultural assets and convey the intangible meaning of place and its relationship to underrepresented populations. Ephemera was once simply defined as all types of written or printed memorabilia (i.e., letters, post cards, tickets, menus, manuscripts, magazines, etc.), “stuff” with an “ephemeral existence,” meaning it was never intended to be saved or preserved. But the term has attained academic credibility in recent years, resulting in part from collectors, curators, and heritage professionals who recognize its ability to document “average, everyday life” through the archiving process. The term ephemera has broadened to now house many categories of “stuff,” everyday items like photographs, prints, drawings, coins and currency, as well as other material objects like toys, clothes, matchbooks, and food containers. Similar to oral histories, local collections of ephemera are capable of giving context to support and inform collective memories and architectural features that connect people, space, and place.\footnote{416}

Like other Rosenwald communities, Allen-White’s is rich with household collections of ephemera. During the research process, I was able to fill gaps in my knowledge simply by looking through former students’ family photographs, volumes of The Allen-White Mirror yearbook, copies of the Allen-White Voice school newspaper, letters and pamphlets from Principal White and the PTA, and other items saved from their time at AW. Christine Rhodes ’48 written personal account proved particularly valuable in helping me discern Dorris Hall’s spatial relationship to the School community because it contained a list of the building’s physical features on both the interior and exterior, as well as a few floorplans she drew of the building. Of its interior, she wrote:

Auditorium/Study Hall used mainly by High School Dept.; Portable stage used or programs at end of school year and other special programs; Coal-burning stove furnished heating; Four light fixtures with white opaque globes suspended from the ceiling providing lighting; One cloakroom was provided for high school students; Wood tables and chairs were used for seating; Oiled push brooms were used to sweep the wood floors to keep dust from scattering…\footnote{417} (Figure 4.8)


\footnote{417} Christine Rhodes, personal account of the Allen-White School, date unknown. See Appendix B for a copy of the document. Courtesy of the Southern Places Digital Collection, Center for Historic Preservation, James E. Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University.
Figure 4.8: Plan of Dorris Hall, drawn by Christine Rhodes, ca. 2000-2010. Courtesy of the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation, Digital Initiatives, James E. Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University.
In his 2005 interview, Fredell Harris ’66 reminisced on his baseball days at AW, stating that “I still have my high school warmups. And I still have my high school baseball socks. I have them folded up in my drawer and my wife knows they’re very dear to me.” (Figure 4.9) In 2022, he proudly discussed the whereabouts of AW graduates using a 2012 chart he made titled “Allen-White School Transcends the USA,” which visually depicts the geographic mobility of the School’s former students:

…we have lawyers and doctors all over the state [and country] right there that come from right here in Whiteville, attended Allen-White High School right here. That goes to show you if you work hard, you’re dedicated and be obedient right there, you can accomplish whatever you want to accomplish.418 (Figure 4.10)
Evelyn C. Robertson’s yearbook and school newspaper collections were also very insightful for my research, which contained a plethora of historic photographs from his time at AW in the 1950s-1960s. They depicted group portraits of student organizations, social events, and athletic teams, as well as shots of the School’s buildings and classrooms. His newspaper collection included articles about various construction projects on campus and fundraising updates, which helped me organize the linear timeline of AW’s history attached in Appendix A. Page excerpts from the yearbooks contained lyrics to the school song, information about teachers and staff members, and mementos that illustrated the day to day happenings on AW’s campus. The yearbooks helped inform my understanding of where buildings were situated on campus, and how students used specific spaces for learning and leisure activities. Lastly, Ann Smithwick’s portrait photographs from her 2005 *Rosenwald Revisited* project provided visual representation of the students interviewed for my own research, and for future generations to remember. Local collections of ephemera such as the ones mentioned above allow underrepresented communities like Allen-White’s to center and foreground their heritage and convey their own

---

420 For more photographs from Ann Smithwick’s *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* project, see Appendix D.
intangible histories with primary source materials, a collaborative process that “democratizes access” and defines ownership by “allow[ing] participants to see themselves in the historical record,” rather than as filtered subjects from the perspective of heritage professionals.421

A third type of qualitative data that was critical to my research for this project were mental maps. They were first used by urban planner and theorist Kevin Lynch, who studied the way people structure their sense of place and spatial orientation in urban environments by asking subjects to draw maps based on familiar physical environments. Also known as cognitive maps, these data provide fabricated illustrations of architectural elements that were most recognized or remembered by the people he surveyed.422 “[Mental maps are] a useful tool for representing people’s real-life worlds,” according to heritage management theorists Maria Younghee Lee, Michael Hitchcock & Joyce Wengsi Lei, “because [they] can help to reveal people’s memories, experiences, and associations” with specific places, based on their ability to “draw detailed mental maps of familiar places and omit unfamiliar places.”423 In his research, Lynch was primarily focused on the construct of urban form, and used mental mappings to decipher how best to plan cities for the human experience.424 But for the purpose of this thesis, I was able to translate his cognitive mapping method into Whiteville’s rural environment by asking the 2022 interview subjects to draw AW’s buildings from memory on a simple map template I created of the campus, which was based on aerial photographs from 1946 and 1952 and my knowledge of the spatial construct of the campus today.425 (Figure 4.11)

425 See Appendix C for the mental maps created by former AW students in 2022.
Figure 4.11: Mental map drawn by Fredell Harris ’66 in 2022.
Experiments like this are becoming more common in the heritage field as practitioners work to expand the AHD to be more inclusive of underrecognized heritages. As a viable form of qualitative data collection in the social sciences, mental maps aid in understanding both a place’s tangible built environment, as well as the community’s intangible heritage associated with or attached to it.\footnote{Claudia Guerra, interviewed by Erica Avrami, “Finding the Soul of Communities,” in Erica Avrami ed., \textit{Preservation and Social Inclusion} (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2020).} For example, through the maps created by AW’s former students, I was able to get a better sense of where and when certain buildings were situated on campus, and also gain an understanding of which areas and activities were most valued on campus and to the general school community based on the spaces students repeatedly drew on their maps. Like the oral history interviews, the mental maps suggest that Cheek Hall’s cafeteria and gymnasium were the most important constructed social spaces on campus, along with the ball fields and outdoor recreational spaces.

Oral histories, ephemera, and mental maps are just three of many forms of qualitative data that can highlight the intangible heritage of communities whose significant places no longer retain architectural integrity or authenticity as defined by the current Standards. Moreover, they are tools that should be implemented by local communities and heritage professionals alike to eliminate western-centric conservation practices and expand the AHD. Underrepresented communities like Allen-White’s should continue to adopt qualitative data collection methods alongside traditional quantitative methods because they are often inexpensive by comparison, and easier to access or achieve through grassroots organizing, which can expedite protection during the conservation process.

This is especially important for communities who are critically at risk of losing significant tangible and intangible heritage, as is the case with AW’s Dorris Hall building which was reduced to a ruin after the 2012 arson and has a dwindling population of students who utilized the building still alive to relay its meaning. The bi-annual Allen-White reunion offers a great opportunity for the community to collect and record oral histories and make mental maps for future exhibitions and to support ECHO’s fundraising efforts. Adding other ephemeral materials like obituaries, newspaper articles, and reunion programs to the local archive will also help the Whiteville community reclaim agency over their own history. These types of qualitative
data are invaluable to communities like Allen-White’s, who must rely on collective memory to tell the stories of their cherished places.

*Digital Methods for Heritage Conservation*

Like other interdisciplinary fields of history and social science, heritage conservation has embraced the limitless potential of the internet and parallel emerging technologies in recent years. Digital heritage, as its come to be known, offers conservationists and communities opportunities to engage in locally driven, place-based storytelling processes that move beyond traditional methods of conservation, which are typically confined to one’s ability to be physically present on-site in order to engage with its history. Online conservation methods address the “diversity-gap” described by heritage practitioner Michelle G. Magalong that exists in the field by affording local communities more autonomy to engage in constructing their own social histories through public participation, community-based archiving, and information-sharing.427

Digital heritage also helps expand the AHD by providing increased access to users who are unable to travel to a specific monument or landscape for various reasons (i.e., health, geographic proximity, etc.), which ultimately brings more awareness and advocacy to traditionally unacknowledged sites like Rosenwald schools. Digital heritage tools are often free and easy to use for the public, include more contextual information than what’s available on-site, and allow for a greater bandwidth of data to support local archives and their connections to one another.428 For example, conservationists and historians in several states across the South are now working together to digitize and connect local repositories of qualitative materials from various Rosenwald School communities like Allen-White’s to illustrate the broader patterns of Black education in America during the twentieth century.429 Two of the most practiced digital methods for heritage conservation, digital documentation and digital storytelling, are discussed below.

Digital documentation is an emerging tool used in the conservation field to record and manage heritage sites for future use. There exists a myriad of digital documentation tools, all of which utilize spatial data through a systemic approach to help conservationists derive, store,

---

428 Loop, “It’s important,” 123-124.
structure, analyze, and present research collected from the built environment through various sources like site surveys, archives, and literature. Although intangible in nature, digital documentation is focused on the tangible built environment. It has primarily been used as a conservation strategy to promote sustainable methods for conserving westernized heritage sites through UNESCO and other dominant institutions as climate change worsens and architects and heritage professionals begin to rethink traditional conservation strategies—like the ones outlined earlier in this chapter—because of their environmental impact. But digital data collection tools like geographic information systems (GIS), light detection and ranging (LiDAR scanning), photogrammetry, and building information modeling (BIM) also have the power to help underrecognized communities digitally reconstruct and interpret lost, damaged, or erased sites of importance.

Tessa Honeycutt is the Architectural Technician at James Madison’s Montpelier plantation in Virginia, a complex site of architectural excellence produced by enslaved labor in 1764. Since 2021, Honeycutt has been working with her colleagues to create a 3D digital restoration model of the plantation’s main house and surrounding buildings. She and her team are using Arc GIS technology to inventory and present architectural and historic data collected from CAD drawings, photographs, video footage, and archival material that date to the property’s restoration between 2003-2009. (Figure 4.12)

---


The digital conservation project is in partnership with the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies (CAST) at the University of Arkansas with grant funding received in 2019 from the Institute of Museums and Library Services (IMLS). Once completed, researchers, historians, and the public will be able to interact with the model’s digitized landscape and interpret the site’s history without physically paying Montpelier a visit, which Honeycutt notes may be difficult for some visitors because of its remote location and lack of ADA accessibility to reach the second floor. “Digital preservation I think is a much more permanent preservation method and it’s much more accessible...[it] gives us a way to experience space at a different time...So, I think it’s just an exciting way for people to engage with the landscape in a much different way,” says Honeycutt, “because I think it’s just a different experience than anything [we’ve] seen at a historic site before.”

In the first phase of the project, Honeycutt spent several months digitizing documents from over fifty boxes of records collected during the restoration project in the early 2000s. Next, she and several architecture students from the University of Arkansas and the University of Virginia built a model of Montpelier and its ancillary buildings in AutoDesk 3Ds Max, a digital design software used for 3D modeling. The digital model was then imported into Arc GIS where
Honeycutt and her team are working to geospatially link thousands of data from the digitized archive to the 3D model’s architectural attributes, a process known as “tagging.” Their work will help illustrate the multi-layered tangible heritage of Montpelier from each phase of the plantation’s history using the digital information stored in the model. “You can click [on architectural elements] and see what [the building] looked like before the restoration. And then you can see what it looked like during the removal phase or during the investigation phase…all the way through to what it looks like now,” explains Honeycutt, “and I think it’s really exciting, especially for people like me who are really into material culture [and architecture], to see that evolution happen.” She also notes the viewer’s ability to zoom out and turn multiple layers on and off within the model (i.e., historic plat maps from various time periods), which allows a broader interpretation of the site as a cultural landscape, a perspective that is impossible to access in person on Montpelier’s 2,700 acre campus.

But Honeycutt also recognizes the complicated colonial implications of plantation sites like Montpelier, and their ability to illuminate suppressed narratives of American enslavement as potential sites of conscience:

[Digital modeling] is a good way to bring invisible landscapes into the virtual realm, which is very important for marginalized groups…because a lot of times their landscapes were the ones that were bulldozed over. So, I think [digital modeling] is a great way for [descendent communities] to become involved with the creation of these virtual landscapes, because they’re the ones who have the oral history [records] of what the buildings looked like and what the cultural landscapes were like.

Honeycutt and the digital conservation team at Montpelier are working to expand the model to highlight the site’s invisible landscapes in collaboration with the local Black community, many of whom descend from Montpelier’s former enslaved population. For example, they’re currently working with the site’s Archeology Department to model the South Yard, which was home to the plantation’s domestic slave community. Honeycutt hopes their efforts will help expand the public’s perception of the site beyond its architectural prestige to include the rich intangible heritage embedded in the cultural landscape built by Montpelier’s enslaved community.432

Similarly, a group of architects and engineers in Alabama are studying new ways to conserve the heritage of endangered Rosenwald schools in the South using digital conservation methodologies. Gorham Bird, an Assistant Professor in Auburn University’s School of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape Design, has been working with his architecture students in collaboration with local communities in Alabama conserve at-risk schools since 2020. The project is funded by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other combined funding sources from Auburn. “I’ve been interested in understanding the physical representation of segregation, particularly in the South,” explains Bird, “[because] when you see injustice today, you can connect it with injustices that have happened in the past…I think that’s always why we try to understand and study history, so that we can better understand the present.” Bird chose to study the Rosenwald schools near Auburn’s campus because of their proximity to the University and their notable historic significance, being among some of the first Rosenwald schools constructed during the Tuskegee phase of the rural school building program. In collaboration with his colleague Junshan Liu, a civil engineer by trade and a building science professor at Auburn, Bird and his students have documented four Rosenwald schools in Alabama thus far, with plans to document at least four more in the near future.

The project is a multi-pronged approach to conservation, and includes various types of digital data collection methods. First, the team uses LiDAR scanning technology to precisely document and measure each building’s form and space. Data from the scans are aggregated in a point cloud and then registered together to develop a digitized building information model (BIM). The BIMs are incredibly useful to detect imperfections that exist in the building that may not be perceivable from the human eye or even from manual documentation, according to Bird. To support the accuracy of the BIMs, the team also uses photogrammetry, which is essentially a series of photographic images joined together to construct virtual space using a point cloud system as well. After the BIMs are digitally constructed, they can be used to pinpoint architectural issues with the physical building or to create an immersive, web-based environment for online interpretation.

A third type of documentation Bird and the students employ is drone photography. The data collected from aerial images help the team understand architectural issues with building systems that are more difficult to access, such as the roof. They’ve also been experimenting with drones to capture orthographic projections and elevations to create construction drawings, renderings,
and physical 3D models for potential physical conservation projects in the future. (Figure 4.13) Each of these three technologies were combined to create a pilot model for the Tankersley School in Hope Hull, Montgomery County, Alabama, which also includes interactive, clickable links to historic photos and videos of oral history interviews collected with former students. Bird and his team hope to construct similar immersive models for the other schools they surveyed.

Figure 4.13: Image of LiDAR generated point cloud of the New Hope Rosenwald School, Fredonia, Chambers County, AL. Image by Gorham Bird and Junshan Liu, Auburn University.

But right now, the technologies used by Bird and his team are incredibly expensive and not widely available, rendering this type of digital documentation project largely inaccessible for middle income communities like Allen-White’s. Without grant funding, the team at Auburn would have been unable to document the four Rosenwald buildings as thoroughly as they did, and they still need additional support to reach their goal of creating fully-immersive models for
the eight planned Rosenwald schools.\textsuperscript{433} Thus, limited access to digital tools creates a substantial barrier for underrepresented communities to conserve tangible heritage in the digital realm too, a problem that further disadvantages vernacular buildings in favor of conserving western elitist architecture like James Madison’s Montpelier, which benefits from various funding sources for research projects like digital restoration. But while the Arc GIS software used for Montpelier’s restoration is also an expensive technology, Honeycutt notes that cheaper options exist for lesser income communities to take steps toward digital documentation using free design software:

Sometimes [digital conservation] is relatively cheap. [For example,] with just general photography, you can build a pretty decent model with a free SketchUp subscription. So, it’s not like it has to be as intense as Montpelier’s model. It can be very rudimentary and still get the point across what a building looked like, [to] at least conserve the look, if nothing else.\textsuperscript{434}

Unlike digital documentation, digital storytelling is an easily accessible method for underrecognized communities to tell stories of the past. Currently, the most popular digital storytelling tool is ArcGIS StoryMaps, a free online software used to create scrollable “stories” by combining text with interactive maps and other multimedia content.\textsuperscript{435} Both Honeycutt and Bird have employed StoryMaps as part of their digital conservation projects because they are universally available to the public and offer an immersive platform for audiences to engage with. “StoryMaps is one of the greatest online tools for digital conservation,” says Honeycutt, “…it’s really easy to use, really easy to build, and it’s a great way to bring in multimedia to make your research more engaging…[they make you] feel like you’re in this little virtual world.” The online StoryMaps program uses features like image slideshows, interactive maps, and timelines to engage with audiences, which Honeycutt notes is especially important for young scholars and users who spend more time online. According to Bird, “digitally reconstructing space” in tools


\textsuperscript{434} Honeycutt Interview, 2022.

\textsuperscript{435} “ArcGIS StoryMaps,” accessed December 27, 2022, \url{https://storymaps.arcgis.com/}. 

191
like StoryMaps allows communities to create a “kind of virtual environment” that express “the experiential nature of place” when the physical environment no longer exists in its original form.\textsuperscript{436}

Tools like GIS and StoryMaps are already being used to digitally narrate Rosenwald schools. For the past few years, cartographer Ian Spangler has been mapping Rosenwald schools across the Fund’s fifteen participating states based on their cost of construction. To support his research, Spangler created a visual StoryMap in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation that depicts a comprehensive history of the school building program in the South. Several other StoryMaps narrate the histories of local and statewide Rosenwald communities as well, such as the “Pine Grove: a Rosenwald Project” map that illustrates the documentation project for the Pine Grove School in Cumberland County, Virginia, and a map titled “North Carolina’s Rosenwald Schools” that includes information about the history and construction of each of the state’s rural Black schools. In Tennessee, MTSU’S Center for Historic Preservation has been digitally documenting and mapping the state’s Rosenwald schools for its Southern Places Project since 1994, although other digital tools like digital modelling and storytelling have yet to be employed.\textsuperscript{437}

For Rosenwald communities like Allen-White’s, digital documentation and storytelling provide opportunities to convey place-based tangible and intangible heritage in one easily accessible place. Exploring digital conservation methodologies and establishing a digital presence is especially important in Whiteville while the physical conservation project is ongoing, and the campus’s future remains undetermined. Even in its most basic form, digital documentation can be used to virtually reconstruct Dorris Hall and the other lost buildings on

\textsuperscript{436} Honeycutt interview, 2022; Bird interview, 2022.
campus that played an important role in the spatial relationship between students and the physical built environment during each phase of the county training school’s history. A digital reconstruction of the campus would certainly bring more awareness to the history of the Allen-White School, and potentially more financial support for the physical restoration project, or any other SOI treatment the community chooses to implement to conserve AW’s extant buildings moving forward.

Furthermore, digital storytelling programs like StoryMaps can help the community build a consolidated repository of existing qualitative materials like the oral histories collected by Ann Smithwick and myself, local collections of ephemera, mental maps, and other resources assembled and added to the digital collection over time. This type of project is financially feasible today, and would give authority back to AW’s community to construct their own identity within the conservation process. Ultimately, the digitized materials would create a compelling exhibition and interpretive space to narrate the School’s rich history of prestige, conflict, and resilience using community-generated collective memories and resources that add to a broader network of digitally conserved Rosenwald schools.

The various avenues for conserving the Allen-White School discussed in this chapter are layered, intersectional, and compatible. Some include SOI treatments to address AW’s fragile tangible architecture, and others explore alternative approaches to highlight the community’s valuable intangible cultural heritage. Each offer possibilities to utilize qualitative materials in both the physical world and digital realm to help conserve and reconstruct AW’s heritage, which is critically at risk of erasure in the coming years. As is the case with most Rosenwald school communities throughout the American South, whose stories remain excluded from the AHD. Moreover, scholarship and policies that confront traditional definitions of authenticity, integrity, and historic significance, like the ones discussed in this chapter, are imperative in the field of heritage conservation to help underrecognized communities such as AW’s find new, combined approaches to conserve invaluable place-based heritage before it’s lost forever.
Conclusion and Recommendations

The intention of this thesis is to contextualize the importance of the Rosenwald Fund’s rural school building program in the greater context of Black education in the American South using the Allen-White School in Hardeman County, Tennessee as a focal point for the program’s success. Furthermore, this thesis argues that the invaluable heritage of Rosenwald school communities—both tangible and intangible—need more attention, advocacy, and resources to manage the future of significant school sites and cultural collective memories, which have historically been neglected or suppressed as a result of an exclusionary authorized heritage discourse (AHD) that favors of Eurocentric architectural relics over underrepresented, vernacular communities. To address problems with the AHD and emerging discussions surrounding significance, authenticity, and integrity, this thesis outlines various avenues for conserving tangible and intangible heritage, all of which are synergistic and critical paths to conserving underrecognized heritages such as that of the Allen-White School and the greater network of Rosenwald school communities that remain at risk of erasure throughout the South.

For over two hundred years, Black Americans in the South were purposely denied education opportunities that would allow them equal access to the social and economic resources enjoyed by White Americans. It was not until the establishment of the Freedmen’s Bureau schools, emancipation, and the end of the Civil War that legislative policies shifted toward providing public education for Black students in Tennessee. It would take another one hundred years for the state’s schools to desegregate and for racialized discrimination to become illegal, yet the construct of White supremacy is yet to be dismantled. Consequently, the Rosenwald schools that remain extant today represent unearthed local histories of southern Black communities that have for too long been ignored. When woven together, these histories tell a greater story of the persistence, pride, and resilience needed to establish a public education system for Black students in the American South during the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Eras.

Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of self-reliance and emphasis on industrial education, coupled with the unfortunate necessity of gaining the support of wealthy, Progressive White philanthropists like Julius Rosenwald, created a system of public schools in rural southern communities that catapulted Black school infrastructure into the forefront of modern education by the mid-twentieth century. But it was ultimately investment from local communities that led
to the expansion of the Rosenwald public school system. In total, the public investment from Black communities represented sixty-four percent—or $17.7 million—of the total funding for Rosenwald schools, “making these buildings one of the largest public investments in black education in US American history.” Moreover, a 2011 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago found that the Rosenwald Fund rural school building program accounted for nearly forty percent of the narrowing of the Black-White education gap in completed schooling for students born between 1910 and 1925 in the United States, with the greatest gains occurring in counties with large percentages of formerly enslaved populations, such as Hardeman County. The study found that the gap continued to decline in the following decades, which likely resulted from the expansion of the Rosenwald school program, among other socio-political factors.

Overall, the value of Black public school property in Tennessee increased from around $2 million in 1920 to almost $9 million by 1946, a staggering increase of over 300%, resulting in part due to the expanded Rosenwald school system in the state. These statistics represent the success of rural Black communities in overcoming politically racialized oppression and institutional restrictions in their effort to create adequate—and often exceptional—education opportunities in the twentieth century American South.

One of these exceptional institutions was the Allen-White School in Hardeman County, formerly known as the Hardeman County Training School, and before that the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children. The story of AW is one of relentless fundraising and perseverance, close-knit community and pride, arson and resilience. It was the only Black high school in Hardeman County until 1959, forty-five years after legislation passed in Tennessee that encouraged high schools for Black students. Today, AW remains a shining example of the Rosenwald Fund ethos and an architectural model of the program’s county training school era built at the crux of its transition from Tuskegee to Nashville. Many students who attended AW went on to embrace the vocational training they received in fields like farming and construction. In 1930, ninety-one farms in Hardeman County were owned by Black farmers. By 1948, 220

Black farmers in the County owned their own land, a drastic increase that historian Ernest Rivers attributes directly to the industrial education offered at AW. Other graduates went to college and became teachers, lawyers, doctors, and legislators, among other professional occupations. More students attended college as decades progressed and the agriculture industry in Hardeman County declined after World War II, a trend that Rivers also attributes to the education students received at Allen-White and the confidence they gained to pursue educational and career opportunities beyond Hardeman County. Former AW students migrated all over the United States and abroad in search of economic opportunities, a diasporic population mobilized by the remarkable education received in Whiteville at the Rosenwald-funded county training school.441

After the ruling of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, most Rosenwald Schools fell out of use, as eventually was the case with the Allen-White School. Since then, schools as far west as Oklahoma and as far north as Maryland have been demolished or fallen into disrepair, largely due to a lack of conservation resources. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust), of the 5,357 total Rosenwald schools built between 1917-1932, only ten to twelve percent are estimated to survive today.442 Luckily, more resources exist now than ever before to confront previously ignored underrecognized histories such as that of the Rosenwald schools, and the advocacy for protection is only growing stronger.

In 2002, the Rosenwald schools were listed on the National Trust’s “11 Most Endangered Historic Places” list. But the listing was largely geared toward raising awareness. Politically, little was done at the time to provide actual resources for local communities to enact feasible conservation plans. More recently, however, the National Trust has become more committed to conserving the remaining Rosenwald schools and the intangible cultural memory of all Rosenwald communities to create space for previously unrecognized histories. In January 2021, the Julius Rosenwald School Study Act (H.R. 3250) was signed into federal law, after having been introduced in the Senate in 2019. The new legislation authorized a special resources study of sites associated with the Rosenwald Fund’s school building program by the National Park

442 “Rosenwald Schools,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, https://savingplaces.org/places/rosenwald-schools, accessed January 3, 2023. Unfortunately, data pertaining to the rural schools built during the Tuskegee phase spanning from ca. 1913-1917 are incomplete and insufficient. However, it can be assumed that approximately six hundred schools built during this time frame have also been lost or are in a critical state of erasure.
Service (NPS) with the goal of establishing a national historical park to celebrate the schools’ legacy. While the legislation is certainly a significant step toward addressing the forgotten heritage of Rosenwald school communities, the selective pool of schools chosen for the study only represents a small percentage of Rosenwald communities in need of heritage assistance. The National Trust’s African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, which was established in 2017 prior to the Julius Rosenwald School Study Act, is perhaps a better resource for Rosenwald communities to receive concrete financial support for taking heritage action as it’s meant to expand the AHD by preserving sites of Black activism, achievement, and resilience by “making room” to “enact positive social change.”\(^{443}\) Although these grants are certainly beneficial to those Rosenwald communities that receive them, the funding is still limited in scope and selective in nature, and thus overlooks the Rosenwald schools as a broader network of institutions that contribute to the history of Black education. Instead of the fragmented approach currently underway, more must be done to establish a holistic conservation plan for the Rosenwald schools before it is too late.

Rosenwald communities like the one in Whiteville certainly need more national recognition and support from the AHD, but conservation efforts must also come from within. Grassroots, localized planning initiatives such as ECHO’s formulate an ongoing relationship between the site and its community, a bond necessary to ensure the success of any conservation approach. In conserving heritage sites like the Allen-White School, community organizing to address tangible built environments in order to reconstruct space and its place-attachment to people for future management is a vital step. But this step should not be taken without consideration for the intangible cultural heritage of these places, which is possibly even more important to conserve because of its ability to convey cultural meaning and invoke place-attachment based on collective memory and nostalgia.

In Allen-White’s case, the School’s four possible arson attacks are currently overlooked and potentially undervalued in the chosen reconstruction treatment approach. This decision glosses over AW as a site of conflict, layered with difficult events in its history that required

resilience and adaptability on behalf of the community to overcome racialized violence time and time again. The story of arson at AW is a ubiquitous part of the story of Rosenwald schools as a whole, a fear of Booker T. Washington and the Rosenwald Fund that was actualized too often in Black communities throughout the South. The racialized violence at AW is therefore significant in the context of Rosenwald school history, and deserves recognition as such. In light of this, Whiteville’s community members should consider alternative SOI treatment approaches, such as the options delineated in the previous chapter, that may be better able to address AW’s difficult history as a site of conscience. Furthermore, ECHO should make additional efforts to conserve the School’s intangible history using qualitative and digital methods before collective memories are lost with an aging AW community. Despite these professional recommendations, it is ultimately up to the community in Whiteville to decide what the best options are for conserving the Allen-White School in a way that satisfies their own wants and needs as the primary stakeholders, a choice that will inevitably carry authenticity regardless of approach.

This thesis asks that the AHD expand to address underrecognized communities currently at risk of losing invaluable physical and cultural heritage. But while striving to be comprehensive, the scope of this project is limited. As such, more research is necessary to understand Rosenwald schools and their contribution to Black education and economic mobility in the United States. The most effective research method would be for national and local heritage institutions to allocate enough resources to conduct a complete survey of extant Rosenwald schools, and an archeological survey on the former sites of those that no longer exist. The data collected from this type of study—both quantitative and qualitative—would be invaluable to our understanding of the Rosenwald school network and its conservation needs moving forward. Furthermore, more research is needed to understand the schools as sites of difficult histories, especially the impact of arson on Rosenwald school sites resulting from the system of White supremacy. To raise awareness and bolster advocacy, local governments need to incorporate curriculums that teach the history of the Rosenwald schools for future generations to understand their paramount influence on patterns of Black education. Finally, increased access to qualitative and digital tools like those outlined in the previous chapter is critical to help underrepresented communities take autonomous heritage action at the local level using resources that have traditionally been restricted to wealthy, westernized groups.
Rosenwald schools like Allen-White created invaluable environments for Black attainment that were previously unthinkable in the South. Students who attended the schools found uplift in their education and confidence in their ability to rise above systems of oppression, segregation, and discrimination imbedded in American society during the twentieth century. Despite its flaws, heritage conservation remains an important tool to tell stories of pride, resilience, self-determination, and identity. We owe it to these communities to finally shed light on those stories.

Figure C.1: Group portrait of former Allen-White students in front of Elcanaan Baptist Church, ca. 2005, photographed by Ann Smithwick. Courtesy of Smithwick, *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* photography and oral history project.
Bibliography


https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/662962.


Bird, Gorham. Interview by Brannon Smithwick, September 8, 2022.


Clinton J. Calloway Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.


General Education Board Papers. Rockefeller archive Center, New York.


Harris, Fredell. Interview by Brannon Smithwick, Whiteville, Tennessee, October 14, 2022.


Honeycutt, Tessa. Interview by Brannon Smithwick, September 15, 2022.


http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/general-education-board-geb/.


Dr. Robert Russa Morton Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.


*Negro Yearbook: And Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*. Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute, 1913.


The Rosenwald Schools Digital Collection. Southern Places Collection. Center for Historic Preservation Middle Tennessee State University.


Smith, Samuel L. *All Along the Way, From Sunrise at Swan Creek to the Evening Shadows at Peabody*. Peabody College: Unpublished manuscript, n.d.


Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1823  First schools in Hardeman County established (for White students only); first documented teachers were Edwin Crawford and Henry Thompson

1826  Six “academies” established for White students in Hardeman County, includes Bolivar Male Academy, Bolivar Female Academy, Lafayette Male and Female Academy, Enon Academy, New Castle Female Institute, Middleburg Male and Female Academy

1867  Tennessee Public School Law passes requiring civil districts establish special schools for Black children when the official population exceeded 25 potential students

1873  Tennessee Parent Act (aka the School Law) enables private schools to acquire public funding by teaching elementary pupils in the district, created segregated public schools

1874  Public school system established in Hardeman County, elementary schools across the county established

1875  First academy established specifically in Whiteville called the Whiteville Institute for Boys and Girls (White students only)

1891  New education legislation in Tennessee leads to the dissolution of the academies, establishes county support via taxation for public education at the primary and secondary levels

1904  Elcanaan Missionary Baptist Church relocates to Whiteville (later becomes integral part of Allen-White curriculum and community)

1905  Jesse C. Allen founds the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children in the former Whiteville Masonic Lodge, first school for Black children in Whiteville

1906  Enrollment for the Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children doubles from 100 to 200 pupils

1909  General Education Bill in Tennessee consolidates vocational education with regular public-school curriculum, provides vocational education in two-year high schools in Tennessee counties

1910  Whiteville Masonic Lodge burned and rebuilt; Allen’s school classes conducted on first floor for Black students
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1914 Hardeman County public high schools established, and Hardeman County School Board formed; Eight total high schools open catering to White students during 1914-1915 schoolyear, including Whiteville High School (no high schools for Black students)

1917-1918 Efforts begin to relocate and expand school begin after visit from Dr. George Washington Carver educated locals about the Rosenwald Fund

1919 Board of Trustees among Black community in Whiteville established to seek construction aid for a new school from the Rosenwald Fund via Rosenwald Tennessee State Agent Samuel L. Smith (Committee headed by Principal Allen and local Black physician Dr. G.A. Shelton)

Local Black landowner Clay Crowder donates ¼ acre of land in March to the Hardeman County School Board who then purchases 3 more acres for new school location (deeded October 17, 1919)

Board of Trustees obtains a $4,000 loan from the Whiteville Savings Bank in September

Construction begins on new school in late October

1920 The Rosenwald Fund donates $1,600 in January for the new county training school’s construction

Jesse C. Allen School for Colored Children renamed the Hardeman County Training School (HCTS) and begins operating out of new school location in February (before construction is complete), grades 1-8 offered

Principal Jesse C. Allen passes away in August, Luther L. Campbell of Knoxville replaces him as principal

Elcanaan Missionary Baptist Church relocates to land donated by community leader Jesse Norment neighboring the Allen-White campus

Construction completed in the fall on Hardeman County Training School’s first building Dorris Hall with initial $4,000 grant and additional funding totaling $14,200; it became the first brick Rosenwald school in Tennessee (and possibly the entire South)

1922 Principal Campbell resigned (possibly dismissed) for failing to raise money for construction loan repayment, George W. Thomas of Chattanooga replaces him as principal
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1925  New Tennessee Public School Law unifies all schools enacted since the 1873 Law, encourages county boards to establish and maintain junior and senior high schools where the need is present, regardless of race (enables HCTS to soon become an accredited public high school)

1928  James H. White of Gallatin applies for principalship at the recommendation of State Agent O.H. Bernard, begins at Hardeman County Training School in the fall after being asked by Principal Thomas to replace him

Hardeman County Training School’s first annual Thanksgiving fundraiser, organized by Principal White, grosses $1,179 to help repay construction loan

1929  $3,128 raised at second annual Thanksgiving fundraiser to complete loan repayment, mortgage burning ceremony held on school campus with honorary guest County Superintendent Katherine Ingram and state agent Dudley Tanner

Water added to Dorris Hall and electricity provided by Christmas to the school campus by the West Tennessee Electric and Power Company Association

1930  Two Black high schools formally established in Hardeman County public school system, one of which is the Hardeman County Training School; accredited for two years of high school education

W.E. Turner, State Director of Negro Education in Tennessee, visits Hardeman County Training School, recommends additional construction and curriculum for further development of the school

Ingram Hall, a two-story frame dorm for girls and teachers, built by trade department students

Howse Hall built by trade department students which houses science department, agriculture department, and a school shop

1931  Hardeman County Training School renamed Allen-White School; two more grades added for a total of four years of secondary education, grades 1-12 now offered (high school referred to as Allen-White High School)

1933  First graduating class of Allen-White High School includes thirteen students (ten of which attended college)

Allen-White PTA purchases a school bus to transport students across the county to campus for $1 per month
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1934  PTA pays for construction of three new buildings on campus: a gymnasium, a sandwich shop, and a boys dormitory; PTA buys a second bus for athletic organizations and other traveling clubs

1936  National Youth Administration (NYA) work-study program established on campus with New Deal funding

Dorm built on campus to house NYA boarding students

Survey of Hardeman County schools reveals 82 total schools, many of which are rural one- and two-room segregated schools for both Black and White children

Local community member Austin Fentress buys a bus and begins transporting more students to Allen-White, Hardeman County Board of Education steps in to support operation and labor costs

1938  PTA purchases two-acres of land from Principal J.H. White on March 10 for the construction of Cheek Hall (to house home economics department, agriculture classes, health classes, a laundry, and a clinic)

Wealthy Nashville businessman John H. Cheek donates $3,000 to purchase construction materials for Cheek Hall; community donates $2,500 toward building efforts at Annual Thanksgiving Rally; Detroit lumber man W.B. Chase donates windows and doors for the building

1938  Allen-White High School men’s basketball team wins National High School Basketball Tournament for Colored Students at Tuskegee Institute

1939  Hardeman County public school system hires independent contractors to drive school buses, provides transportation for students

1940  February 19 fire destroys Cheek Hall before construction is completed; J.H. White and PTA immediately begin new fundraising efforts for the building

Hardeman County school board votes to establish a transportation bus system incorporated into the public school system

Education Policy Commission rates Allen-White School as one of four leading schools in the U.S. focused on “citizenship”
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1941  John D. Rockefeller III and other northern philanthropists visit Allen-White, Rockefeller recommends General Education Board grant the school $7,500 for Cheek Hall reconstruction efforts

Cheek Hall reconstruction, and other campus construction projects begin with NYA student labor and both public and private funding; construction halts when the NYA program dissolves on campus after Pearl Harbor and national focus shifts to World War II

Allen-White High School women’s basketball team wins National High School Basketball Tournament for Colored Students at Tuskegee Institute

1945  Additional philanthropic organizations donate funds to complete Cheek Hall, including the General Education Board, Erwin Freund Foundation, Marshall Field Foundation, Phelps-Stokes Foundation, and Kellogg Foundation

1946  Allen-White Chosen to participate in Fisk University’s Southern Rural Life Program under sociologist Charles S. Johnson during the summer

1947  Agnes L. Tierney Hall and Gilbert Hall dedicated in November

1948  Cheek Hall completed and dedicated on April 22

Principal White leaves principalship to become resident of Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, Carl L. Seets replaces him

New classrooms and Business Department added along with typing and shorthand curriculum

1949  Allen-White accredited for two more years, becomes an optional six-year school for additional training

1952  Principal Seets resigns, Major A. Jarrett, former student of Allen-White, replaces him as principal

General Business and driver’s education classes added to curriculum

1954  Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision rules that U.S. state laws regarding segregation are unconstitutional

1964  10-classroom brick elementary school constructed at north of Dorris Hall

Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

1966-1967  Allen White Elementary School created under Principal C. Elma Motley

1969  Evelyn C. Robertson Jr. becomes principal of Elementary Department, replacing C. Elma Motley

1970  Hardeman County Schools formally integrate, Allen-White High School closed after spring semester ends; Former Allen-White students bussed to either Bolivar or Middleton High Schools beginning in the fall 1970-1971 schoolyear

Allen White Elementary School renamed Whiteville Northside Elementary School; Former high school Principal Jarrett replaces Principal Robertson as elementary school principal

1971  Cheek Hall construction materials purchased by local businessowner N.E. Schultz for new usage, building burns in February (presumably by arson) before materials could be moved

1974  Whiteville Northside Elementary School officially closes on former Allen-White campus and students integrate into the new Whiteville Elementary School building

Dorris Hall used as a cosmetology classroom and lab around this time

1976-1980  Dorris Hall used as a community cannery during U.S. War on Poverty initiative

1982  Former Allen-White School campus purchased by the Whiteville Business Enterprise, LLC. to develop buildings into local Black-owned small businesses

1990s  Campus purchased by Elcanaan Baptist Church and restoration efforts took hold

2005  Allen-White School listed on the National Register and Tennessee Register of Historic Places

2008  Elcanaan Community Hope Organization (ECHO) formed to spearhead Allen-White conservation efforts

2012  Allen-White’s original Rosenwald building, Dorris Hall, burned by arson on May 20th around 2:30am

Architectural plans of reconstructed building created, engineering survey determines building foundations still architecturally sound
Appendix A: Timeline of the Allen-White School

2016  ECHO receives $90k State of Tennessee appropriation with help of state assembly member and former student Johnny Shaw, represents the start of the Allen-White Capital Campaign

2018  ECHO partners with project management firm Jones-Bridget Consulting Group with the help of the Southwest Tennessee Development District

2019  ECHO prepares the Allen-White Center for Education and Cultural Advancement Capital Campaign Case statement by project development consultant, ECHO Officers, and Allen-White coalition leaders

Echo receives a second $50k grant from State of Tennessee again through State Representative Johnny Shaw

2022  Fundraising for the reconstruction project ongoing at time of publication
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes ‘48

Recollections of M. Christine Rhodes

I attended Allen-White from grades 1 through 12 (1936-1948), graduating in May, 1948.

Auditorium/Study Hall - Used mainly by High School Dept.

Portable stage used for programs at end of school year and other special programs.

Coal-burning stove furnished heating.

Four light fixtures with white opaque glasses suspended from the ceiling provided lighting.

One clock room was provided for high school students.

Wood, tables, and chairs were used for seating.

Dried peat brown was used to sweep the wood floors to keep dust from scattering.

Ceiling and walls were of wood painted dark brown. Doors were also of wood and painted brown with metal knobs.

A bell housed in the principal’s office was used to signal the beginning and ending of each school day as well as for hourly class changes, and recess.
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes ‘48

There were four windows in each classroom, none in the library. Each classroom in the Elementary Dept. had its own clock, room and stove. The first graders used tables and small chairs. The older, elementary students used stationary wooden seats which served as a chair, desk, and storage space for books and other school supplies. Lighting in all classrooms was from a single incandescent light bulb suspended from the ceiling. The Auditorium/Study Hall had white opaque globes over its light bulbs.

There was no indoor plumbing. Two outdoor toilets were on campus. Students quenched their thirst from a single spigot outside. There was no water fountain.

There was no air conditioning. One electric stove was provided in 1947-48 for senior home economics students to learn to prepare meals.

There was a built-in counter with stools to provide seating for the home ec students.
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes ‘48

Exterior of Building

The south, west, and south walls of the school building were red brick, with two red brick pillars on the concrete porch or promenade. There were concrete steps at each outer or exit door. There were air or moisture vents built above the porch or promenade.

There was a chimney for each coal-burning stove.

The white, wood, lattice fence on the south end of campus was the dividing line between the school and Oleaner Baptist Church parking lot. A wire fence ran along the west side of the campus. A portion of the east side of the campus was used as a roadway for buses, cars, etc.

I'm not sure if roofing was black asphalt shingles or green octagons. Perhaps you could ask Prof. Leonard Miller what was used at Butler Industrial back then. Most people used whatever was available or popular at the time.

Note: Elma Darlow said that she has an old photograph of the exterior of the building.
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes '48
Appendix B: Description and Plan of the Allen-White School by Christine Rhodes ‘48
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix C: Mental Maps by Former Allen-White Students
Appendix D: Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix D: *Rosenwald Revisited: Wisdom from the Elders* Allen-White Photographs


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix E: Historic Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus

Dorris Hall, view northwest. Photo by the author, 2022.

Dorris Hall front (south) façade, view north. Photo by the author, 2022.
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus

Dorris Hall interior, view south. Photo by the author, 2022.

Dorris Hall interior entry, view south. Photo by the author, 2022.
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus

Dorris Hall east façade, view west. Photo by the author, 2022.

Dorris Hall east façade, view west. Photo by the author, 2022.
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


1964 elementary school building east façade, view northwest. Photo by the author, 2022.
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus


Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus

Possible foundation of non-extant shed, view northwest. Photo by the author, 2022.

Former location of northernmost recreation and agriculture fields, view north. Photo by the author, 2022.
Appendix F: Modern Photos of the Allen-White School Campus

Oak tree remains on site of former campus playground, view west. Photo by the author, 2022.

Neighboring Elcanaan Baptist Church (west façade), view east. Photo by the author, 2022.