



PUBLIC INFORMATION

ITEM NO. 2.

DATE OF MEETING: September 21, 2009

REQUESTED BY: Ms. Claudia Stack

SHORT TITLE: Presentation on Rosenwald Schools in Southeastern North Carolina

BACKGROUND: Ms. Stack would like to make a presentation on Rosenwald Schools in Southeastern North Carolina.

Fact Sheet about Rosenwald Schools in Southeastern NC

Compiled by Claudia Stack

- In 1912, Booker T. Washington, the founder of the Tuskegee Institute, persuaded Julius Rosenwald, the president of Sears, Roebuck & Co., to support the construction of six primary schools for African American children
- The “Rosenwald school” building program expanded rapidly, and the Rosenwald Fund was established in 1917 to further Rosenwald’s philanthropic efforts
- With assistance from the Rosenwald Fund, communities in 15 states built 4,977 schools, 217 teachers’ homes, and 163 shop buildings by 1932
- The National Trust notes that by 1928, one-third of rural African American students in the South attended Rosenwald schools, and the schools eventually served over 650,000 students
- By the time the Rosenwald Fund ceased school-building operations in 1932, it had contributed over \$4.3 million to school construction, while African American communities had contributed over \$4.7 million (excluding land and labor)
- The Rosenwald Fund provided matching grant support that typically covered 20% of the cost of a school
- Communities usually contributed 20-25% of the cost of the school, often in a combination of cash and materials, and also often donated land and labor
- The local school board had to commit to cover the remaining cost of the building, and to operate it as a public school
- Although effective in leveraging school construction, African Americans’ contributions constituted double-taxation, as they paid taxes but then had to raise additional funds to build public schools
- Progressive building plans were provided by the Rosenwald Fund, giving southern African Americans their first recognizable public spaces
- North Carolina’s African American communities demonstrated their commitment to education by building 813 Rosenwald schools, more than any other state
- Communities in southeastern North Carolina were very active in the Rosenwald school movement: New Hanover, Pender and Brunswick County communities built 35 schools between 1917 and 1930
- Pender County communities led the region, constructing 19 Rosenwald buildings on 15 school sites
- Pender County probably has the highest proportion of surviving Rosenwald schools in North Carolina, with at least eight Rosenwald buildings still standing
- Familiar local examples of Rosenwald schools include the brick Williston school on 10th Street in Wilmington, and the wooden Browntown School (now an antiques store) on route 17 just south of Hampstead

Sources: National Trust for Historic Preservation, The Rosenwald Schools of the American South (2006) by Mary S. Hoffschwelle, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935 (1988) by James D. Anderson, “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina” (NC Historical Review volume LXV, no. 4, Oct. 1988) by Thomas W. Hanchett