Identifying Rosenwald Schools in South Carolina

In 2002, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, in cooperation with the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission, began a project to identify Rosenwald Schools. Using records of Rosenwald Schools located in the Fisk University Archives in Nashville, TN, we have been able to create a database of the documented schools that were built using matching grants from the Rosenwald Fund. Much of this initial work was done with the help of a University of South Carolina graduate student, Darryl Murphy, in 2002 and 2003.

After the completion of his assistantship, we were without a dedicated staff person to continue the project. But through the persistence of the African American Heritage Commission, we were able to petition the General Assembly for the funds necessary to create a staff position at the Department of Archives and History to oversee this very important project as well as other projects pertaining to South Carolina's rich African American heritage. In October of last year, we hired Leah Brown to serve as the African American Heritage Specialist. She is responsible for picking up where Darryl left off with regard to identifying, recording and, in addition, providing technical assistance to people interested in preserving these schools.

(title slide)

Today's presentation will give you a brief overview of the development of Rosenwald schools in this state in the early twentieth century, the general state of many of these schools and the direction the project will take in the coming years.

(Wolfe Bay School piers)

Unfortunately, we are discovering that most of the 481 Rosenwald Schools built in South Carolina are no longer standing like the Wolfe Bay School in Sumter County. Only the piers of the school remain.

(Cloak Branch School)

This makes the schools that do remain all the more important. It is hard to understand the significance of Rosenwald Schools without understanding the types of school buildings they often replaced. In 1917, the State of South Carolina spent $17.86 per child on educating white children and only $1.89 per child for black children. Even by the late 1930s, public schools for blacks were mostly small, dark, unpainted deteriorated buildings like the Cloak Branch School in Florence County and

(Red Hill School)

the Red Hill School in Richland County.

(Rosenwald plans)

In contrast, Rosenwald Schools were soundly built, light-filled, and spacious. The Rosenwald Fund provided plans and strict guidelines for school construction including providing adequate space for the number of pupils.

(interior of Model School, Denmark)

The bands of large windows are a prominent feature of Rosenwald Schools. This is the Model School in Denmark.

(interior of Carroll School)

The guidelines recommended tongue and groove ceilings and walls for the smaller frame buildings, which we found in the Carroll School. This photo is before the rehabilitation. I will show the after pictures in a few minutes.

(interior of Crawford School)

The guidelines also specified that the schools were to be painted inside and out and one of the color schemes recommended was painting the ceiling cream, the walls buff, and the wainscot walnut—much like the Crawford School in York County. This school is not listed as a Rosenwald School, but it is obvious that Rosenwald plans were used to build it.

(sketch of school grounds)

Each school had to be set on at least 2 acres, and the Rosenwald guidelines also addressed beautification of the school grounds.

(plans for privy)

and construction of privies.

(Rosenwald plans)

There were evidently several different plans for Rosenwald Schools. For example, Plan # 20—on the right—provided two classrooms and an industrial room on the front.

(New Light School)

The New Light School, in Anderson County is an example of Plan #20. Although the building has been altered, you can still see the basic form with the projecting room in the middle of the front of the building.

(Steele Hill School)

The Steele Hill Rosenwald school was originally Plan #20, but it has been converted to a residence. According to people who attended the school, the projecting front room was used as a lunchroom. The cloakroom on the front is still intact.

(Rosenwald Plans)

Plan #400—on the right—included four classrooms with cloakrooms and vestibules in bays set back on each end of the building.

(St. Mark's School, Florence County)

St. Mark's School in Florence County was built using this plan. This photograph was made in the 1930s or 40s. We don't know if it is still standing.

(Mountain Springs School)

Although the Mountain Springs School in Anderson County has been extensively altered, the basic form of Plan #400 is still evident. The windows and doors have been changed, but the original roofline is intact. On the left you can see the set back part of the school that included the cloakroom and vestibule.

Unfortunately, in the counties we have studied so far, we are finding that few Rosenwald Schools remain.

(insurance photo of Model School, Denmark)

3 Rosenwald schools were built in Bamberg County. The Model School in Denmark is the only remaining school that we have identified. The school was built around 1930-31. It was a three-teacher school and was used for training teachers at Voorhees College. The total cost was $3,700. Black citizens contributed $200, the State provided $2,800, and the Rosenwald Fund provided $700. This is a picture of the school in the 1930s or 40s.

(Model School, Denmark)

and today. The windows on the front have been covered with plywood, but we think they are still intact underneath. But due to a lack of maintenance, the roof has deteriorated and that leak has greatly impacted the condition of the interior. But, we are hopeful that with the cooperation of the local school board, which currently owns the property, concerned citizens and staff from the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, this school will be saved and will continue to serve the community in to the future.

(Pine Grove School, Richland County)

13 Rosenwald schools were built in Richland County, but we believe the Pine Grove School is the only Rosenwald School remaining. The school was built in 1923. The Rosenwald Fund contributed $700, the State contributed $1,200, black citizens contributed $285, and white citizens contributed $315. This is the front of the building and

(side of Pine Grove School, Richland County)

this is the side.

(insurance photo of High Hill School, Sumter County)

14 Rosenwald schools were built in Sumter County. The High Hill School is the only remaining school that we have identified. This picture of the school was made in the 1930s. The school was built around 1925-26. The total cost was $3,200. Black citizens contributed $1,300; the State contributed $1,200; and the Rosenwald Fund contributed $700.

(High Hill School, Sumter County)
This is a picture of the school today. There is a large addition on the right, but on the left the outline of the original building is still evident.

All news about Rosenwald Schools is not gloomy, however. There are a number of people who appreciate the buildings as tangible reminders of the importance of education to black South Carolinians.

(Howard Jr. High – exterior (Prosperity Rosenwald School, Newberry County)

Just recently, the South Carolina State Board of Review approved the application of the Howard Jr. High School to listing in the National Register of Historic Places and it is now pending final approval by the National Park Service. It was originally a four-teacher school with a two-room addition following shortly after. Concerned citizens are now in the early stages of planning. They hope to use it as a community center.

(Howard Jr. High – interior)

The interior is far more intact than would be expected from outward appearances.

(Hope School - exterior, Newberry County)

Hope School is another one of the original 26 Rosenwald schools found in Newberry County. While we don’t yet know how many survive in South Carolina, this is one of the few very intact buildings we have. Due to its constant service to the community it is in very good condition.

(Hope School – interior, Newberry County)

One of the rooms in this 2-teacher school still has the original desks. Once the renovation is complete, the school will serve as a location for a number of necessary community needs including an adult day care center, a pick-up point for a meals-on-wheels program, an after school tutoring center, and more.

(Mount Zion Rosenwald School front—before)

Ms. Mabel Dickey has led a group that nominated the Mt. Zion Rosenwald School to the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. It became the first Rosenwald School listed in the National Register from South Carolina. This is the front of the building before rehabilitation began

(Mount Zion Rosenwald School front—after)

and after

(Mount Zion Rosenwald School side—before)

This is the side of the building before

(Mount Zion Rosenwald School side—after)

and the side after. Once the interior is completely restored, the building will be used as a community center.

(Carroll School)

The York County School District has restored the Carroll School as a field study where 55 classes of fifth graders come annually to learn what it was like to attend school in the Depression era from the African American perspective. This one-day class is a part of a 10-day curriculum.

(Carroll School-interior)

The Rosenwald project has really just begun. The Department of Archives and History and the African American Heritage Commission plan to continue to gather information about Rosenwald schools in the state through activities like this reunion and to increase awareness about the importance of the schools to the history of our state.

(2006 Objectives)

Some of the project objectives are to establish contacts (local historical organizations, churches, and individuals) in each of the 46 counties who can help us in locating and identifying these schools, continue to develop a Rosenwald school mailing list so that

we can begin to share information, create a forum in which to discuss the issues specific to the preservation of these schools, publish a “how to” guide that can help groups navigate the rehabilitation process, create partnerships with other state agencies (DOE, PRT, SCNHC, COGs, the Humanities Council and others) and hold a statewide Rosenwald school workshop.

Turn off projector

Leah has copies of the Fisk University records for each county here today. We invite you to come by and look over those records. We can talk more about the research she has been doing and we hope some of you can share information about Rosenwald schools in your area.