



Rosenwald School Renovation  
Prepared for the City of Oxford, Georgia

In collaboration with:



The Center  
FACILITATING COMMUNITY  
PRESERVATION & PLANNING



University Of Georgia  
Metropolitan Design Studio



THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

**CE+D**  
landscape architecture  
historic preservation  
environmental planning

COLLEGE OF ENVIRONMENT + DESIGN

2013 Oxford Pedestrian Connectivity Study

[www.youneedaschoolhouse.com](http://www.youneedaschoolhouse.com)



# Acknowledgements

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**Town of Oxford:**  
City Manager: Bob Schwartz  
City Council Chair: Jim Windham  
Citizen: Vivian Harris  
Citizen: Anderson Wright  
Citizen: Dewy Perry

**The Center:**  
Kay B. Lee  
Lucy Courchaine  
Adam Kirk

**University of Georgia  
Metropolitan Design  
Studio**

John Beal  
Shawn Fink  
Danny Han  
Kale Hicks  
Kevin Kelly  
John Lathem  
John Verderber

Donnie Longenecker



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In the early to mid 20th century, Sears and Roebuck was a retail giant on the scale of Walmart. The president of Sears and Roebuck was Julius Rosenwald. Because of his position, Rosenwald was a very wealthy man, and he used his wealth and influence to become one of American's leading philanthropists.

In 1908, a race riot in his hometown of Springfield, Illinois caused Rosenwald to turn his attention towards helping out the African American community. After reading a copy of "Up From Slavery," Booker T. Washington's autobiography, Rosenwald became convinced that Washington was a man with whom he could work to help African Americans. The two met at a luncheon and decided to combine their efforts. (NPR)

"From their vastly different families and homes and conditions Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald had taken similar lessons- the conviction that there is dignity in work and meaning in service to others, that the best way to serve people is to give them tools to help themselves." (Deutsch p 170)



Booker T. Washington, negroartist.com

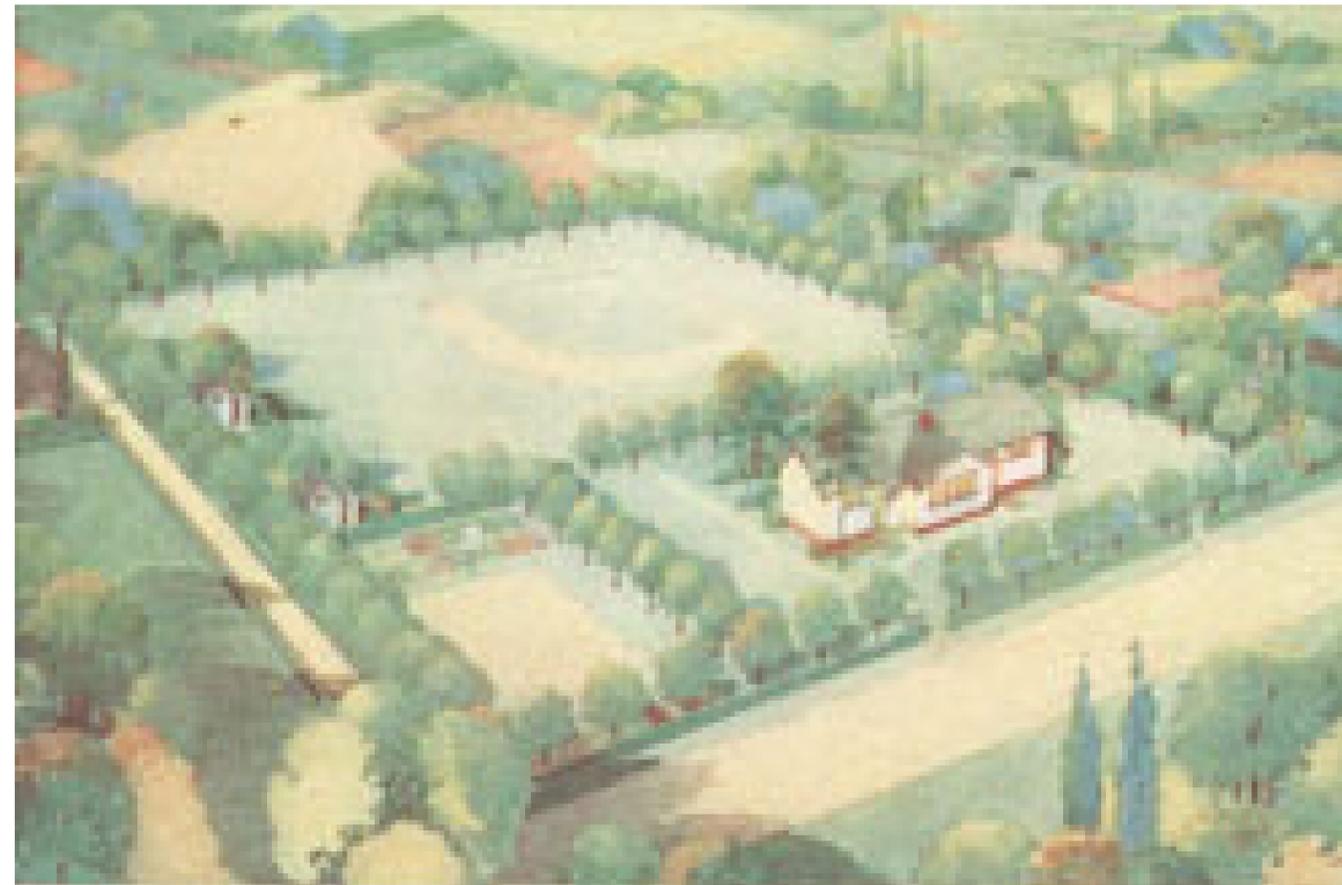


Julius Rosenwald, brittanica.com



Washington believed the best way to help the African American community was to build schools. (NPR) His belief, combined with Rosenwald's money, resulted in the creation of 4,977 schools, 217 teacher's homes and 163 industrial shops. (Deutsch p 156) However, Rosenwald's money was not the primary source of funding. His contributions, while still a sizable \$4.3 million, was only 15% of the total funding. The remainder of funds came from state governments and the local communities. (Deutsch 156).

“They [local citizens] donated not just money but also land, building materials, labor, food for workdays, and - most important - the energy and persistence to insist the schools be built. Theirs was the crucial ingredient...without which they would not have been the significant elements in the community that they became.” (Deutsch 156)



Rosenwald School Plans, [historysouth.org](http://historysouth.org)

Once constructed, the schools were then staffed by African American educators who, in most cases, had received formal education at Tuskegee Institute. “The...African American men and women who taught in Rosenwald schools...were admired, valued...role models for many of the young people they taught.” (Deutsch 165) Students learned much more than ‘the three Rs’ (reading, writing and arithmetic) at the Rosenwald school. “ In fact, the schools...left many of their students with...a warm sense of pride. One graduate...described her sentiment for it as a ‘home’ feeling ....a place where one is loved, valued, and accepted.” (Deutsch 165) Furthermore, the school also served as a central gathering place for the African American community. “Because of segregation...there was no Little League, swimming pool or community center. The school was the community center.” (Deutsch 165-6)

The entire Rosenwald school program made an indelible mark on African-Americans in the South. “It is perhaps not too much to say that the spirit that inspired many of the men and women who contributed land and money and energy to Rosenwald schools became the defining strength of the movement...to [end] segregation and for civil rights.” (Deutsch 167)



Oglethorpe Rosenwald School, [georgiaencyclopedia.org](http://georgiaencyclopedia.org)



The Supreme Court's ruling in 1954 on Brown vs. Board of Education desegregated the American educational system and made the Rosenwald schools obsolete. After that time, many Rosenwald schools were abandoned, demolished or fell into serious disrepair. In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) placed the Rosenwald schools on their list of endangered sites and began providing grant money for their preservation and restoration.



Cairo Rosenwald School, clarksvilleonline.com



To better understand the history and character of the Rosenwald school, the UGA Metropolitan Studio visited the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center in Cassville, GA. Opened in 1924, the Noble Hill Wheeler School was the first “community school plan” in Bartow County, Georgia.

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Built with money from the Rosenwald fund, Noble Hill Wheeler School had an enrollment of as many as 100 students. The school provided the equivalent of a first through seventh grade education. The school was closed in 1955 following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision from the US Supreme Court. Afterwards, the school fell into a state of disrepair.

Noble Hill Wheeler alumni Dr. Susie Wheeler and her sister in law, Bertie Wheeler, spearheaded a preservation and restoration program for the school. They formed a community organization which was able to raise over \$200,000 in private donations and grants which resulted in the restoration and reconstruction of the building. In 1989, renovation was completed and the building re-opened as the Noble Hill Wheeler Memorial Center. (Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center.)





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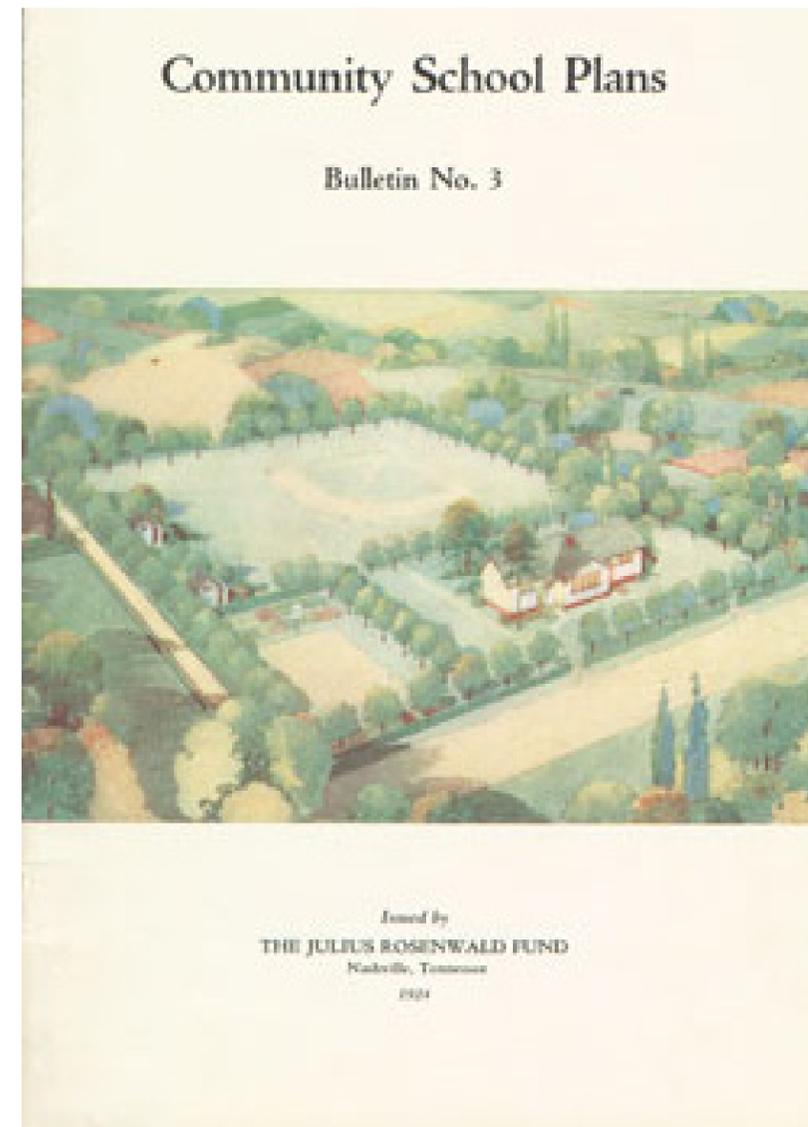
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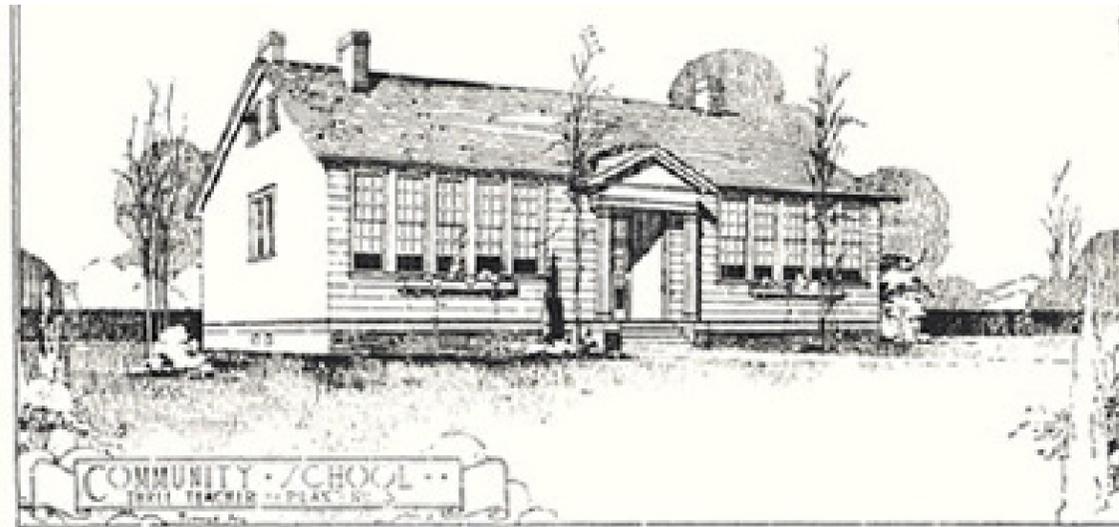
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Tuskegee Institute staff in architecture and mechanical industries developed the initial design for Rosenwald schoolhouses. The Rosenwald schools were also unique from an architectural standpoint. Architects who worked on the design of the schools incorporated Progressive principles of “...lighting, ventilation, heating, sanitation, instructional needs and aesthetics - all intended to create positive, orderly and healthy environments for learning.” (National Trust for Historic Preservation)

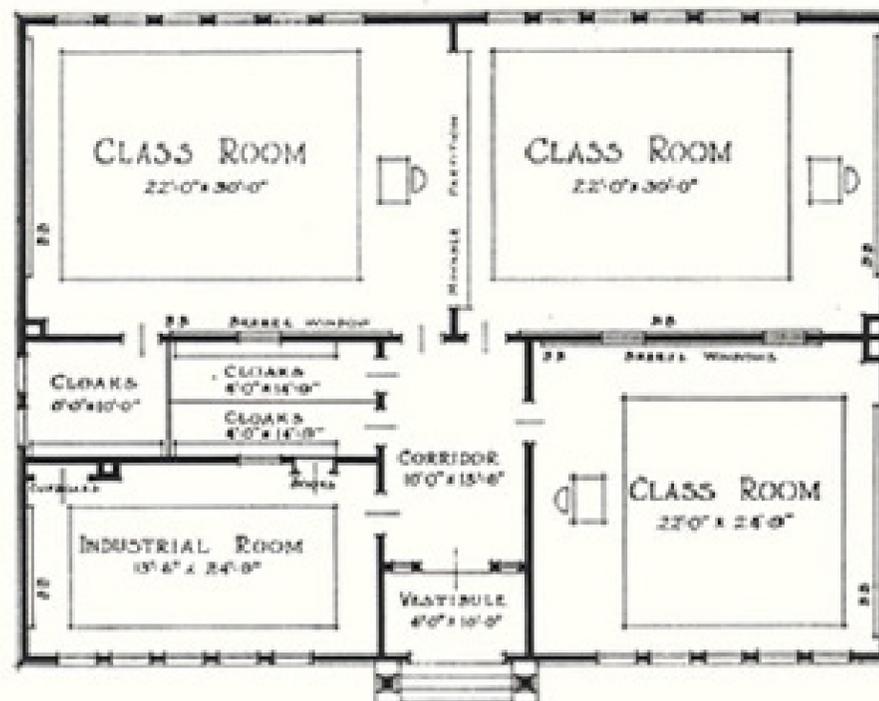


Community School Plans, [historysouth.org](http://historysouth.org)



These “Tuskegee plans” as they were known, reflected the needs of teachers and students who were engaged in a “Tuskegee style” curriculum. There were spaces for boys to be educated in industrial education and women to receive instruction in “domestic science.” Windows were grouped into “batteries” that enhanced natural light. All the buildings were constructed on a raised foundation to improve ventilation. Each of the plans contained moveable partitions that could easily be transformed into community centers. (National Trust for Historic Preservation)

In 1920, Julius Rosenwald hired Fletcher B. Dresslar to review the program. Dressler found that many schools were being constructed with substandard materials and techniques. In addition, the plans were not being followed. At Dresslar’s recommendation, management and oversight of the school construction program was relocated from Tuskegee Institute to Nashville, TN. There, Dressler and Samuel L. Smith developed a book of plans and specifications for Rosenwald schools. These plans were known as the “Nashville Plans” or “Community School Plans,” and used from 1920-1931. Based upon interviews conducted with alumni, we have determined that Oxford’s Rosenwald school was a three teacher “Nashville” plan. (National Trust for Historic Preservation.)



FLOOR PLAN NO 3  
THREE TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY

Three Teacher Plan, historysouth.org



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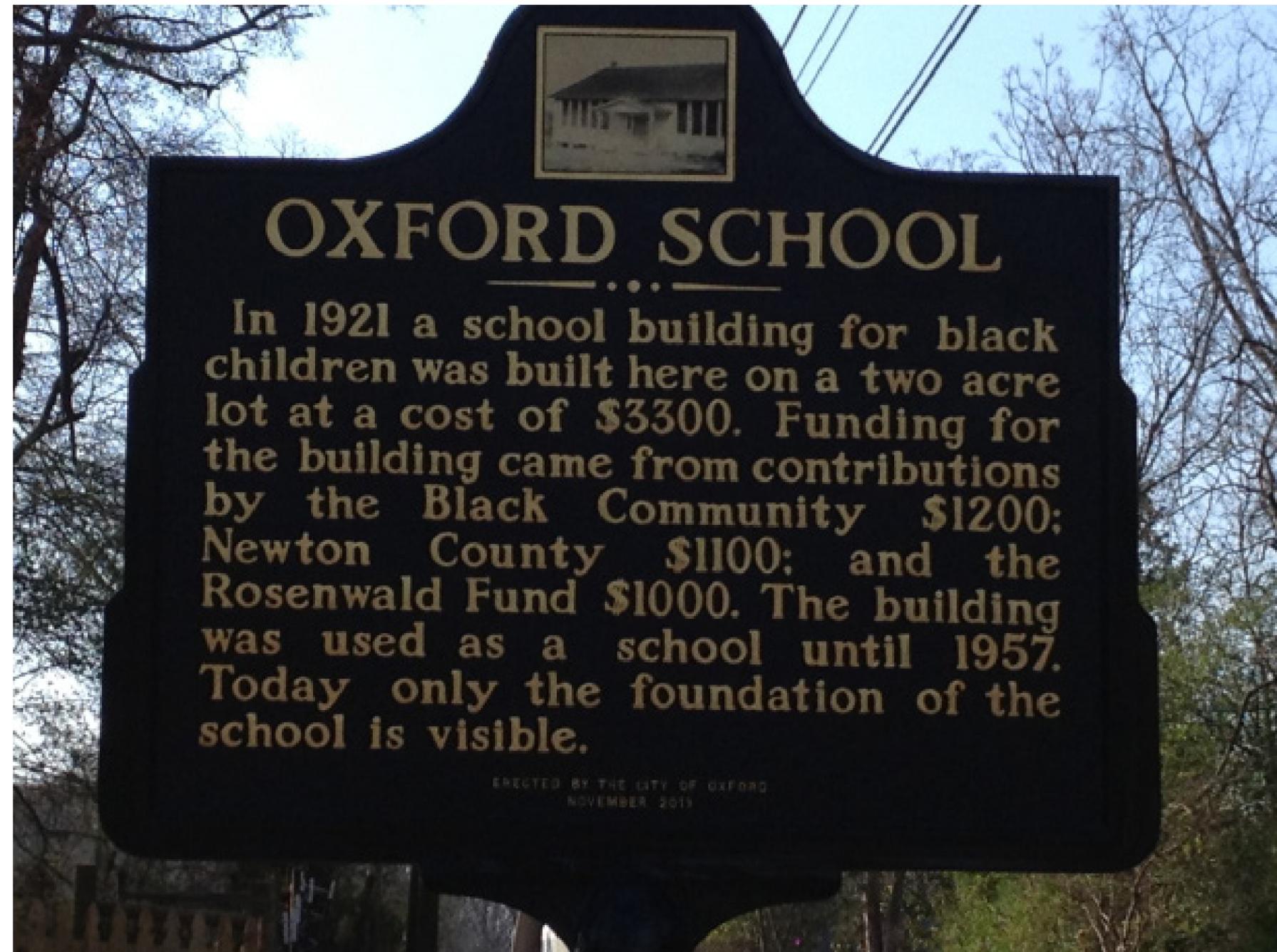
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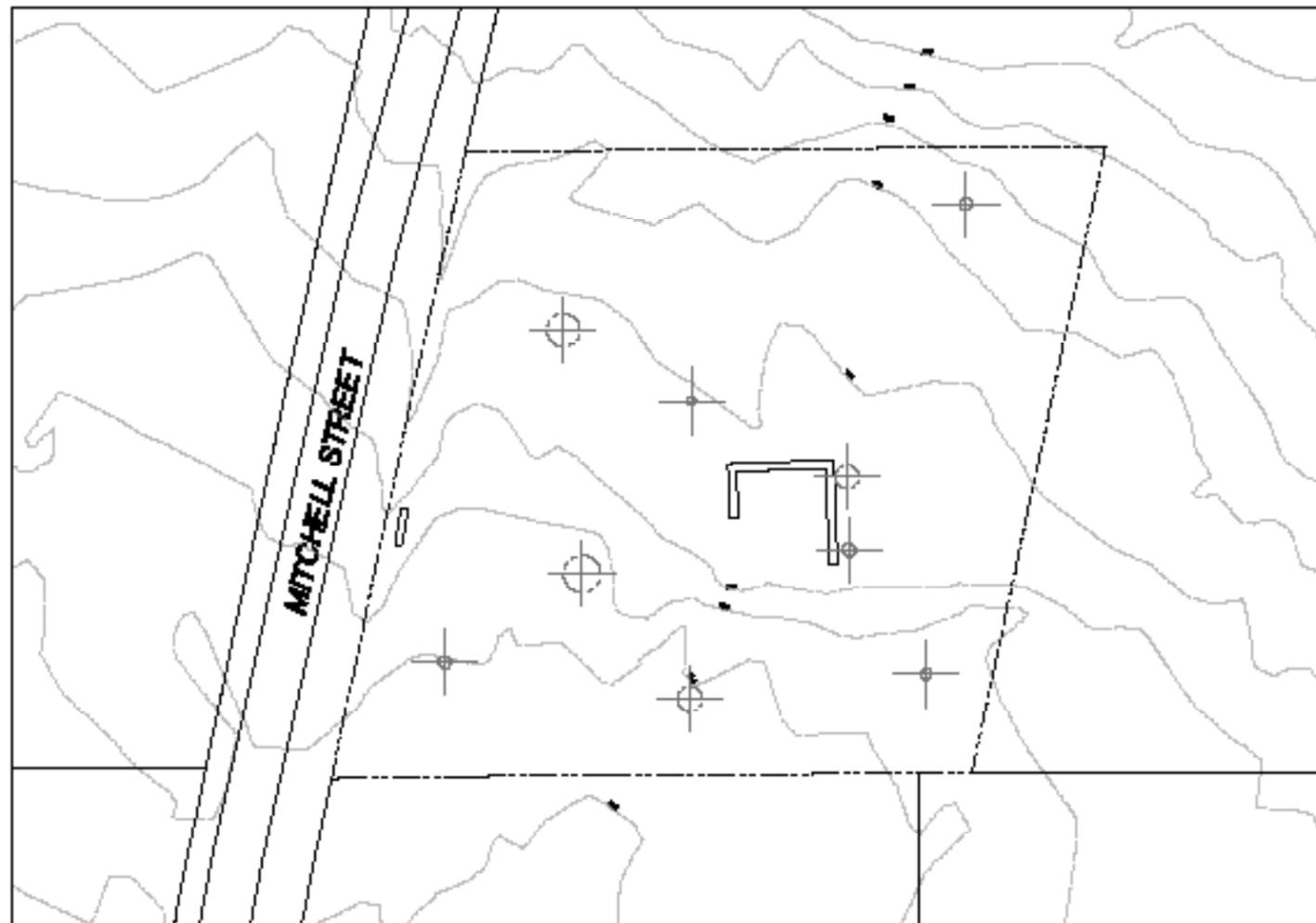
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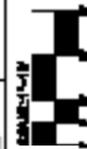




The design students also took many site visits to get a feel for the area, as well as mapping out locations of existing 70 year old oaks and uncovering the old foundation of the original building.



ROSEWALD SCHOOL  
OXFORD, GA



After visiting the site and getting a lay of the land, the design students met with alumni Vivian Harris and Anderson Wright. Harris and Wright attended the Oxford Rosenwald School and are among a handful of the living alumni who still reside in Oxford. The students spent hours interviewing and listening to the wonderful stories of Harris and Wright. The goal of all this interaction was to give the students a sense of the history and original setting of Oxford, with an emphasis on the Rosenwald School. The two shared memories with the students ranging from the layout of the original building and the surrounding landscape to using the outhouse in the winter and the potbelly stove in the corner that used to heat the four roomed building. The students also learned of the desires of the alumni, what they wanted to see on the site and how best to accommodate everyone's needs.





This site holds great history from the south during a trying period in American history. Alumni stated that they never felt the pressure of segregation when they were at the Rosenwald School and that it felt like home to be there. The UGA students designed with that thought in mind, trying to recreate a peaceful and pleasurable place to escape from daily life and enjoy the outdoors. With the building as the focus of design, site and landscape plans were created that transformed the site into a little park area which hopefully brings back wonderful memories for the students who come back to visit. Included in the designs are areas for original student recognition along with history of the school and the Rosenwald program. The idea is that alumni will return to the site for gatherings and reunions and be able to reminisce and enjoy the school again.





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# Guide to Preserving Rosenwald Schools

## 10 Tips for Getting Started:

- ◇ **Determine ownership of the school building and property.** Will the owner sell, donate, or give permission for you to repair and sue the building?
- ◇ **Identify the immediate threats.** Demolition? Water Intrusion? Vandalism? Animals? Insects?
- ◇ **Seek professional help.** Call the Rosenwald Schools Initiative of the National Trust to discuss your project.
- ◇ **Get organized.** Who will lead the project? Fundraise? Volunteer? Determine partners and alliances that can help your project succeed. Consider forming your own 501(c)(3) nonprofit group.
- ◇ **Seek official designation.** Listing in the National Register of Historic Places or state or local register will be especially helpful when applying for grants. Contact your state historic preservation office (SHPO) for more information about this process.
- ◇ **Determine a new use that will be financially sustainable and compatible with the building.** A community needs assessment can be especially helpful.
- ◇ **Plan your project.** Determine what work will need to be done, who will do it, and how much it will cost.
- ◇ **Build community support.** Get the community excited about your rehabilitation project. You are saving an important piece of history!
- ◇ **Call for assistance!** The National Trust for Historic Preservation and your state historic preservation office are there to help.

Mary S. Hoffschwelle, Preserving Rosenwald Schools



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## Rosenwald Meeting Minutes

January 30, 2013 Agenda: Learn Historic Content of the Rosenwald School system

- Details:
- Vivian Harris, Anderson Wright & Dewy Perry attended the Rosenwald school in Oxford Ga.
  - Vivian – “was like Heaven to me... we didn’t focus on the problems”
  - Anderson – “Not to me... I would like to see the site have historical content and be attractive to many
  - Meditate – Sit in the Breeze
  - Create a library inside a reconstructed school house
  - The Schoolhouse was a 4 Frame building – “Cafeteria” area in the front
  - Another section was added later
  - Dewy – “...it was a Paradise, a good school, with good teachers...”
  - “Oxford was always unique, ...it was segregated... the Washington type high school was foreign to me”
  - Let people know the History
  - Vivian - “The Rosenwald schools have put out some of the most influential and prominent people in our society...”
  - Few books, they were hand me downs, I remember one book having a cover one year
  - No plumbing – “We didn’t know plumbing – Freezing in the outhouse
  - “We valued education, we knew education was the most important thing to get ahead”
  - Pot Belly Stove – Coal Stove
  - As the boys got older we cut wood to feed the fire
  - This was one of the better Rosenwald schools, they had great teachers, all of the teachers were black, and lived in the local communities or Atlanta
  - Vivian moved up North to Michigan at 12 yrs. old – she was the only black girl in the school, and she was amazed that many of the white children couldn’t do Algebra”
  - “I really value the great education I received in Oxford”
  - “had the Gettysburg Address memorized at 15.”
  - “Can’t go forward without knowing where you’ve come from”
  - Our Dream is to Rebuild the School House
  - The outhouses were to the rear
  - There was a playground to the left with a baseball fields and basketball (located where the cow pasture is now)
  - 121 children would walk 3-4 miles a day to school
  - They would like a dwarf tree in memory of these families
  - Education will get you out of poverty
  - There were wood floors – in the summer they would pour motor oil between the floor boards to settle the dust
  - Annie May Watts taught Perry’s father
  - Peasville, Shakerag, the Hill, Texas – incorporate these names into trail

February 7, 2013 Agenda: Define Historic Boundaries – (Peasville – Shakerag – Texas etc.)

- Details:
- Shakerag had the only gathering – entertainment areas for the black community – a place for men to court woman
  - The Cozy Nook Inn – (Down the street from Oxford Elementary) another weekend entertainment destination
  - Charlene Hunter – 1st black woman student at Emory
  - Hull st. = Tallest peak in Oxford
  - Wesley – Godfrey (former garbage dump)
  - Paths through Texas – Airport Rd -> Richardson, Richardson W,
  - Path to Wesley between Coke St. over creek - Mitchells/Wright,
  - Wesley behind Cemetery was a baseball field (drew great #’s of ppl.)
  - Peasville – Soule & Mitchell, Emory going East of Watson -> down to Mitchell
  - East of Peasville is Shakerag
  - The Black community of Oxford was considered “Elite’s” compared to the rest of Newton County.
  - There were no Sharecroppers in Oxford city limits – Many of the students from the surrounding areas outside of the town limits were sharecroppers and attended the Rosenwald school
  - Ex. “Fireplace” site was owned by a prominent Brick Mason who built many of the buildings during that era, and also trained many local masons
  - The oldest black home in Newton County is on Godfrey & Soule
  - Atticus Haygood wrote passage about Vivian’s Grandfather – John Israel Godfrey in a book
  - Mr. Anderson brought in a book about the Rosenwald schools,
  - You Need a Schoolhouse, by Stephanie Deutsch – Sears/Roebuck
  - The old Church – Slave cottage of Kitty – (alleged Mistress of the Super Intendant) – She is the only person of color buried in the white cemetery in the South-East section – there is an ex. tree memorial planted there in her honor.
  - The Cottage was on top of the hill behind the church. The cottage was ultimately transferred to Salem rd.
  - During the Civil War General Sherman spared the town of Oxford from burning when Atlanta was burned down because he was dating a woman from Oxford
  - Much of Emory University was used as hospital facilities during the war.
  - Former gravel walkways along Wesley to Collingsworth
  - The ex. post office was an old grocery – feed store

February 28, 2013 Agenda: Present Design Concepts

- Details:
- Note – add parallel parking along Mitchell
  - Contact Vivian and give her details about editing the destination map
  - Leave Design Concepts at city hall for feedback from Frank Davis, Vivian Harris, and others
  - They are working on creating a Rosenwald School Committee (under the Oxford umbrella)
  - The division of the Methodist Church started in Oxford
  - There are many historic sites within the cemetery
  - Historical Name References may offend certain people, but we don’t want to ignore or not acknowledge history