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Jeanes Schools

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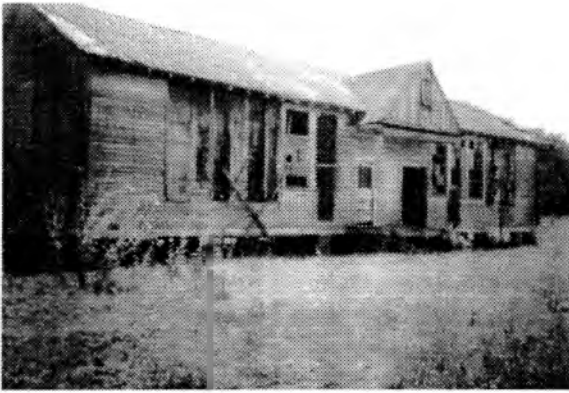
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Jeanes Schools

Other organizations and individuals showed concern with the education of rural black children before and during the years of the Rosenwald Plan. The United Presbyterian Church maintained several missions with educational centers in Alabama's Black Belt counties, and, accordingly, few Rosenwald schools were built in that area.

Another active benefactor, Henry H. Rogers of the Standard Oil Company, worked with Booker T. Washington from 1905 to 1919 to build schools in the South with gifts of money matched by the local black communities.



*Little Elk School—A Jeanes funded school in Limestone County, AL, that adapted Rosenwald plans and added a simple temple-front entrance porch.
Photo Nancy Rohr.*

In 1907 Anna T. Jeanes, a Philadelphia Quaker, consulted with Washington about her educational concerns. She was interested both in small rural black schools and recruitment and management of competent teachers to staff them.

Miss Jeanes noted that no one in the state educational hierarchies appeared to be responsible for guidance of the teachers at black schools. She established a \$1 million fund for this kind of supervision. Basically, experienced black educators supervised novice teachers in the field.

Jeanes' plan was similar to one in Virginia that offered demonstrations of good teaching, and this idea expanded to the concept of countywide leadership. The Jeanes Fund also eventually evolved into a position for an Assistant Superintendent in charge of Negro schools in many states. By 1913, when Rosenwald was beginning his efforts, there were already 16 Jeanes teachers in 17 Alabama counties (Bond 269-271).

The goals of the two funds worked well together. If not enough cash was raised to build a Rosenwald School, the Jeanes teachers held a rally and helped raise the necessary money with a raffle or a picnic in the community. In one town, farmers committed a small plot of land planted in cotton—the “Rosenwald Patch.” They donated the proceeds to the school building fund (Stein 14). Jeanes supervisors first campaigned to urge church congregations to finance a proposed school near their place of worship. After all, black children in a rural setting were most likely already attending classes in a church building. In fact, despite the influx of capital from the Rosenwald and Jeanes Funds, 60 percent of black schools in Madison County continued to meet in local churches, in less than optimal conditions (*History* 7).

It was not easy to overcome resistance in the community on two fronts. Older blacks often were uneasy about change—what had been good enough for them, they reasoned, was good enough for their children. On the other hand, Southern whites saw little reason to cooperate. Why help “coloreds” build a better school than they themselves might have attended as children? The task was formidable.



Little Elk School—The cloakrooms, the small stage, and four chalkboards are still standing where Mrs. Louise Lochart and Mrs. Minnie B. Yarbrough taught. Vestiges of the interior color scheme can still be seen and the two-seat student desks are still stored in the attic. Photo Nancy Rohr.

In 1939, in nearby Limestone County, the Little Elk schoolhouse was built. This one-story, two-room, wood frame school, inspired by the Rosenwald program and supervised by Jeanes funding, was the first in its area built specifically for black children. Though the structure clearly retains its basic look, today the building is used merely for hay storage. (Note: The site recently has been placed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. Funding efforts are now underway to relocate the building to property offered by the Little Elk Missionary Baptist Church.)

In Madison County, a Jeanes Meeting was held once a month. All black teachers attended. Early administrators are unknown, but from 1944-1952, Mattie Jordan Phillips served in the capacity. The Jeanes Fund paid one-half of her salary.

By the time Addison Fields assumed the duties of supervisor in 1953, Jeanes funding was depleted. The program was over.

In due time, all the one-teacher schools were consolidated; 3,500 black children would soon be served by 25 teachers spread throughout 40 schools.

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