

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Community Rosenwald School, DeSoto Parish, LA

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

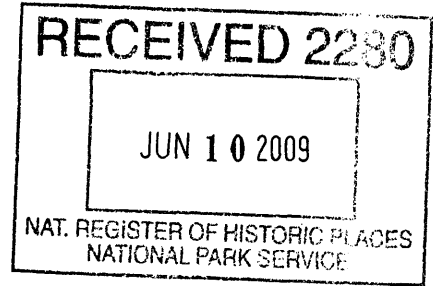
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Community Rosenwald School

Other Name/Site Number:

545



2. LOCATION

Street & Number LA HWY 3015

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Grand Cane

Vicinity: X

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: DeSoto Code: 031 Zip Code: 71032

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: Statewide: X Locally:

Signature of Certifying Official/Title

Scott Hutcheson State Historic Preservation Officer

Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

6/9/09 Date

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper: [Handwritten Signature]

Date of Action: 7-22-09

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private: X
Public-Local:
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1
1

Non contributing
0 buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: education Sub: school
Current: social Sub: civic (meals to elderly)

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: no style

Materials:

Foundation: brick (piers)
Walls: weatherboard
Roof: asphalt
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Summary:

Built in the 1928-29 school year, the simple one-story wood-frame building known historically as the Community Rosenwald School faces west in a rural setting a few miles east of the village of Grand Cane in DeSoto Parish. There is only a slight setback from two lane Louisiana 3015 (perhaps 20 feet). Beyond the school is a large grassy area where African-American children from the surrounding rural areas once played. All in all, alterations to the school have been relatively minimal. In short, there is no question that someone from the historic period would immediately recognize their old school, as would any student of Rosenwald school architecture.

The Community Rosenwald School is sheathed in drop, or beveled, wooden siding and is raised about a foot off the ground on brick piers (some replaced with concrete blocks). Sills are visible on the exterior as wide boards. The asphalt shingle roof features simple exposed rafter tails.

Rosenwald schools were built to a series of plans provided by the Rosenwald Fund. The candidate is clearly Plan #20 for a two-teacher school (see attached), both in plan and overall exterior appearance. As was typical, a few modifications were made by locals when building the school, as will be outlined below.

Façade (facing west):

The symmetrically articulated school has a main gable-end roof (running perpendicular to the road) with a projecting gable at the façade mid-point. Two widely spaced windows pierce the projecting gable to light a small classroom. Plan #20 shows a bank of four windows in this location, but it is clear from the exterior and interior sheathing that the Community Rosenwald School has always had only the two widely spaced windows. To each side of the forward-projecting gable is a recessed entry. Beyond each entry are two small windows placed fairly high on the façade. They light what were originally small cloakrooms.

All of the façade windows (replaced – see below) are set off in narrow bands of wood applied vertically over the drop siding. (This type of treatment is also found on the only other elevation with windows, the rear.) At first glance, this

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would lead one to wonder if the pattern of openings had been changed, but it has not (per the architectural evidence and interviews with former students).

Side elevations (facing north and south):

The gable end side elevations are without windows. They are identical (drop siding), except the south facing end has some patched areas and some exposed studs where siding is missing. (The two vertical members found here must have been used for patching. Otherwise they make no sense.) Both gable peaks are pierced by louvered vents.

Rear elevation (east-facing):

The rear elevation features two sets of three roughly evenly spaced windows set off by the vertical elements mentioned above. Each group of three provided light and ventilation for the school's two main classrooms.

Interior:

Most fortunately, the Community School retains most of its original interior character and architectural fabric, including the original wooden floors. As noted previously, the floorplan provided for two large classrooms in the main body of the building, with a third smaller classroom in the forward-projecting gable. Small cloakrooms are to the side of each entrance. Today, the main block reads as one large room. Rosenwald floorplan #20 shows the two classrooms separated by a very wide opening fitted with a folding partition. However, former students at the Community School (from the 1930s through the 1950s) indicate that their two classrooms were separated entirely by a folding partition. And there is no evidence in the wooden floors of the removal of walls.

All of the walls retain their original narrow gauge beaded board sheathing, with the exception of some replacement fabric (flush vertical boards) along part of the rear wall (perhaps half of the rear wall). Most of the ceiling is sheathed in the same beaded board. The exception is an area of replacement fabric (plywood sheets) installed after a tree fell on the building many years ago. There are a series of eight doors along the façade wall, each with a transom – two for each cloakroom, two entrance doors, and two leading to the small classroom. All but the two entrance doors are original. They feature multiple horizontal panels. Door and window frames are made of simple boards.

Alterations/Assessment of Integrity:

On the exterior, small shed roofs once accented the entrance doors, and the windows are aluminum replacements. (The windows mimic historic glazing patterns and do not immediately read as replacements – that is, until one looks closely.) On the interior, as mentioned previously, the folding partition is long gone, and a portion of the ceiling and back wall were re-sheathed after a tree fell on the school many years ago. Finally, a low partition has been added in one cloakroom to provide bathroom stalls, and the small front classroom has been converted to kitchen use. (In reference to the latter, this has meant the insertion of kitchen appliances and cabinets. Most of the beaded board wall covering remains visible.)

Given the overall condition of Rosenwald schools across the South, the Community School is notable more for its architectural integrity than for what has been changed. It easily is able to convey its historic identity as a Rosenwald school. As noted in the beginning summary, students from the historic period would readily recognize their old school, and scholars of the Rosenwald school building program would think "Rosenwald school" should they drive the back roads of DeSoto Parish looking for survivors.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National Register Criteria: A X B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): NA A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance: education; ethnic heritage: black

Period(s) of Significance: 1929-1958

Significant Dates: same

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Community Rosenwald School is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A: History because it represents the most ambitious school building program in the state for African-American children in the early twentieth century. Of the 393 Rosenwald schools built in Louisiana between 1914 and 1932, there are only 3, possibly 4, known survivors (at least in recognizable form). The three documented Rosenwald schools are: Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish (National Register), the candidate, and the Longstreet Rosenwald School, also in DeSoto Parish. Final documentation is pending on another school, moved within the last few years to Donaldsonville from elsewhere in Ascension Parish. The period of significance for the Community School spans from 1929, the year it opened, to 1958, when it discontinued in use as the only public elementary school for blacks in the Grand Cane area.

Termed "the largest school building program for African Americans in the South since Reconstruction," the Rosenwald Fund's benefactor was Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. While Rosenwald provided the all important funding, the program was actually the brainchild of famed African-American educator, Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington had already established several rural schools near Tuskegee when in 1913 he sought Rosenwald's permission to use \$2,800 remaining from a gift to Tuskegee to construct six more schools. Rosenwald visited the "model" rural schools, was impressed with what he saw, and soon provided funding for an additional 100 schools in Alabama. Named the Julius Rosenwald Rural School Building Program, the work expanded to other states by 1915. It operated out of Tuskegee until 1920, when an independent office was established in Nashville, Tennessee. Each state hired an African-American Rosenwald building agent. By the time the fund closed in 1932, over 5,300 schools had been built in 15 states at a total cost of \$28.4 million. One in every five rural schools for blacks in the South was a Rosenwald school. (The ratio was higher in Louisiana - one in four.)

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The Rosenwald Fund provided matching grants to construct school buildings, teacher cottages and/or shops. Schools were built to a variety of standardized plans provided by the fund, ranging from small one and two teacher units to the largest, which housed seven teachers. The school plans recommended proper site orientation, construction materials, finishes and furniture. Rosenwald schools were almost entirely of wood frame construction. Most were very plain, with no attempt at styling. A minority featured modest Bungalow or Colonial Revival details.

The Rosenwald Fund came with numerous guidelines, including minimum school year requirements and local financial support for the matching grants. Essentially the schools were public-private partnerships with the major players being the Rosenwald Fund, local school authorities, and the black community. The sites and buildings of all schools aided by the fund had to be the property of the local school board. To receive aid, the people of the community in question had to secure a cash match, whether from school funds, private contributions or a combination thereof. Labor, land and material could be counted toward the match.

Of the \$28.4 million total cost for Rosenwald schools in fifteen states, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$4.3 million, blacks \$4.7 million, local governments \$18.1 million, and private contributions from whites 4%. Given their generally impoverished state, for rural Southern blacks to have raised \$4.7 million is quite remarkable. Quite simply, the desire for education was that fervent. From all over the South Rosenwald agents reported stories of great sacrifice and ingenuity in raising funds.

There is no question that the need for decent school buildings was great. Not since short-lived experiments in Reconstruction had there been such an ambitious program for African-American education. Louisiana's story by and large parallels that of many a southern state. After Reconstruction, when white Democrats regained control of the state, retrenchment was the watchword of the day. Funding for public education in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was insufficient for even a single school system, let alone the dual system mandated by segregation. In short, white schools received little funding and schools for blacks even less. The situation was at its worst in rural areas.

So-called public schools for blacks in Louisiana were typically a public-private effort, with school authorities providing some funding and local sources (often churches) providing a building and other resources. Schools were often located in churches or lodge buildings, and teachers were poorly qualified. As T. H. Harris, State Superintendent of Education from 1908 to 1940, observed in his autobiography: "In most cases Negro churches were used for schoolhouses and the only equipment in these churches were the benches used for church services. The school term was from two to four months and the teachers were uneducated and wholly unequipped to instruct children."

And while public funding for black education increased in the early twentieth century, it remained most definitely a separate but unequal system. In the first three decades of the twentieth century public education for whites improved dramatically as "modern brick schools" were built in town after town. But such fine facilities were virtually unknown to blacks. Funding statistics per child tell the tale. A September 1918 Board of Education report observed that in twenty-three parishes in Louisiana less than one dollar was spent on each black child, while in the same parishes between fourteen and twenty-nine dollars was spent on each white child.

The gap was filled in many private ways. In South Louisiana, the Catholic Church provided parochial schools. And, most importantly, educating southern blacks became the focus of various northern philanthropic foundations, with huge sums of money being poured into the cause. The largest of these by far, indeed a name synonymous with black education in the rural South, was the Rosenwald Fund. Rural Louisiana received its first Rosenwald school in 1916, and by 1932, there were 393 in the state. Of the fifteen targeted states, there were only four with more schools funded than Louisiana (Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas). Given the breadth of the project in Louisiana, it is little wonder that the name Rosenwald remains a special one to older African-Americans. Many recall a picture of Rosenwald next to that of Washington and Lincoln being common in the schools, and the annual Rosenwald Days held at namesake schools throughout the South are well documented.

The official Rosenwald Fund archives, held at Fisk University in Nashville, show that Louisiana's 393 schools (roughly one of every four rural black schools) were located all over the state and came in various shapes and sizes. The funding breakdown of the 393 schools plus 31 teacher cottages and 9 shop buildings was: \$457,318 from blacks; \$70,407 from private white sources; \$855,781 from public sources; and \$338,000 from the Rosenwald Fund. The schools had a combined capacity of 51,255 pupils. Distribution ran from five or six per parish to as many as 37 (Caddo Parish). DeSoto, where the candidate is located, had five

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Rosenwald schools. There were generally fewer schools per parish in heavily Catholic South Louisiana, particularly in the Mississippi River parishes. But even Catholic areas needed Rosenwald schools. (There were not enough parochial schools, and there were Protestants in need of better schools.)

Tragically, all available research indicates that Louisiana has lost almost all of its Rosenwald schools. The author of this document, with 30 years of historic preservation experience in the state, has been looking, on and off, for extant Rosenwald schools for the last several years. She knows of only three, possibly four, survivors: the candidate; the Longstreet Rosenwald School, also in DeSoto Parish; the Plaisance School (National Register), St. Landry Parish; and a school moved within the last few years to Donaldsonville (Ascension Parish) to save it from demolition by neglect. The candidate is quite well documented in Fisk Rosenwald Fund Archives as a Rosenwald School. The school now in Donaldsonville looks exactly like a Rosenwald school model. Final documentation is pending as to whether it was funded through the Rosenwald program.

Rosenwald Fund records show that the Community Rosenwald School was built in the 1928-29 school year at a total cost of \$3,266, with the fund providing \$500; blacks, \$550; and \$2,216 provided from public sources. During most of the historic period grades one through seven (sometimes eight) were taught there. According to a State Department of Education document titled "Public Schools for Negro Children, 1943-44 Session," for that school year three teachers at the Community school taught grades 1-7 to a total enrollment of 122 students. Interviews with former students indicate that it remained in use as the only public elementary school for local blacks through the 1957-58 school year. (The names of the students are in the bibliography. A teacher, Francis Johnson, was also interviewed. She began teaching in the candidate in 1930.)

Today the Community School is one of relatively few surviving Rosenwald schools in the fifteen states where the Rosenwald Fund operated. States across the region are seeking to identify and recognize Rosenwald schools. In fact, Rosenwald schools are now "high on the radar screen" among preservationists in general. Sadly, far more have been lost than survive. In 2002 the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed Rosenwald schools on its "11 Most Endangered List" and launched a Rosenwald School Initiative to help identify and preserve the relatively few known survivors.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anderson, John D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Embree, Edwin R. and Waxman, Julia. *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund*. Harper and Brothers, 1949.

Hoffschwelle, Mary S. *Preserving Rosenwald Schools*. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2003.

Hoffschwelle, Mary S. *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*. University Press of Florida, 2006.

Interviews with former students, Pearlie Bailey Brown, Armentha Boyd, Myrtis B. Dinkins, Ruth Lewis Davis Whitaker, Ernest Boyd and Azzie Williams, and teacher Francis Johnson. Conducted by Donna Fricker, March 22, 2006.

Mansell, Jeff and Brinkley, Trina. "The Rosenwald School Building Fund and Associated Buildings." This is a National Register multiple property cover form for Rosenwald schools in Alabama.

Porter, Betty. "The History of Negro Education in Louisiana." M.A. thesis, Department of History, Louisiana State University, 1938.

Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

Rosenwaldplans.org. This website reproduces various primary sources, including the school plans.

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“Special Report on Negro Education in Louisiana, Session 1923-1924.” Bulletin No. 104, Louisiana State Department of Education, November 1924.

Williams, J. E., State Supervisor, Negro Education. “Public Schools for Negro Children, 1943-44 Session.” Bulletin No. 534, Louisiana State Department of Education, July 1944.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University (Fisk University, Nashville, Tn)
- Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approx 2 acres

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 432740 3552520

Verbal Boundary Description

Legal Property Description: Beginning at the northwest corner of Section 21, Township 13 North, Range 13 West; thence run East 70 yards; then run South 140 yards; then run West 70 yards; then run North 140 yards to the place of beginning, including all buildings and improvements thereon.

Boundary Justification

Boundaries follow property lines of the parcel of land historically associated with the school.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Donna Fricker, Fricker Historic Preservation Services, LLC

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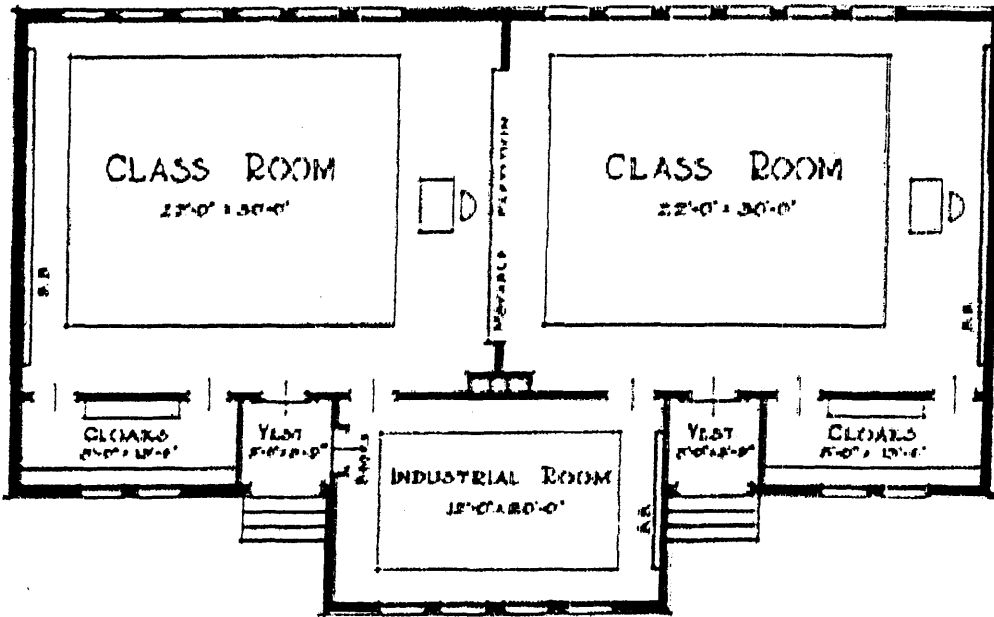
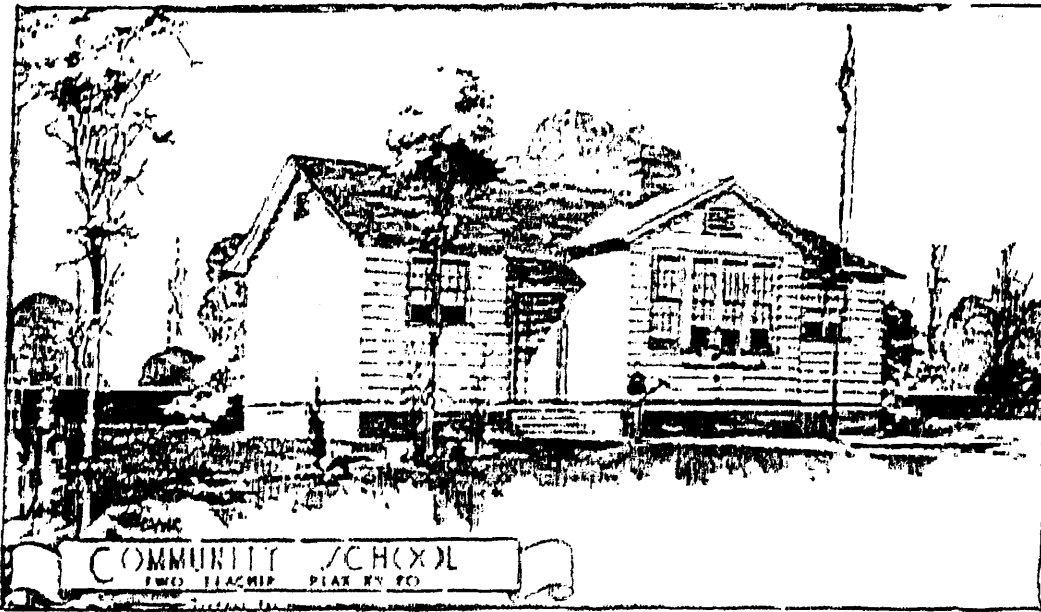
Date: March 2009

PROPERTY OWNERS

Reverend Donzell Hughes
St. Elizabeth Baptist Church of Grand Cane
503 Hall Street
Bossier City, LA 71111

Reverend C. Byrd, Jr.
New Elizabeth Baptist Church
3571 Sloan Road
Mansfield, Louisiana 71052

Two Teacher Plan to face East or West
Rosenwald Foundation



FLOOR PLAN No 20
TWO TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY