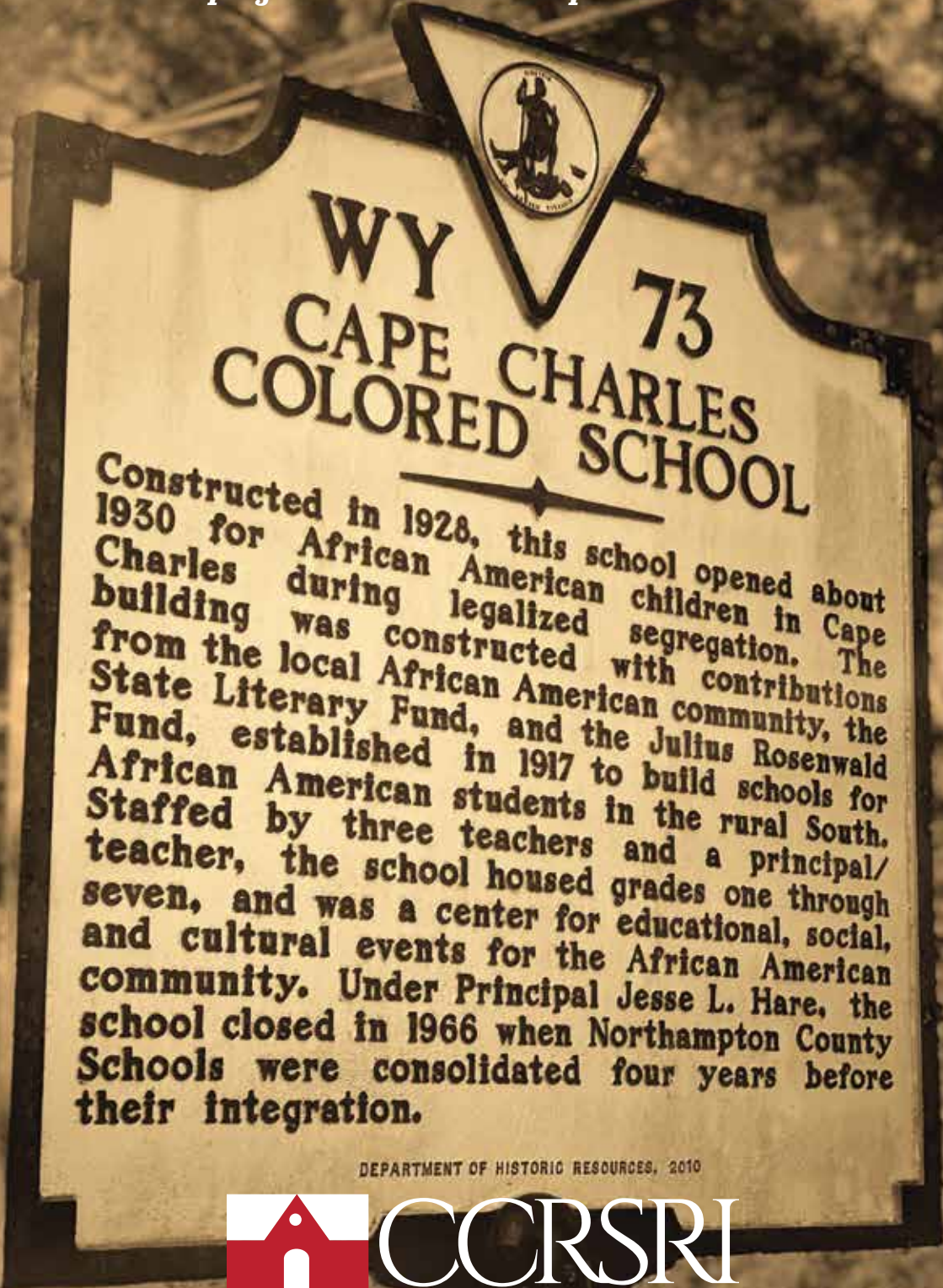


Brick by Brick

The Campaign to Restore the Cape Charles Rosenwald School



Constructed in 1928, this school opened about 1930 for African American children in Cape Charles during legalized segregation. The building was constructed with contributions from the local African American community, the State Literary Fund, and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, established in 1917 to build schools for African American students in the rural South. Staffed by three teachers and a principal/teacher, the school housed grades one through seven, and was a center for educational, social, and cultural events for the African American community. Under Principal Jesse L. Hare, the school closed in 1966 when Northampton County Schools were consolidated four years before their integration.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORIC RESOURCES, 2010



Cape Charles Rosenwald School Restoration Initiative



Consider the humble brick.

One is insignificant. But hundreds of bricks together can form a structure that's durable and resilient. Brick buildings stand longer than those made of many other materials. And they retain their value.

The Cape Charles Rosenwald School is a perfect example. This elementary school, built nearly a century ago for the education of African American children, remains standing thanks to its sturdy brick construction. But that's not the only reason the building has retained its value.

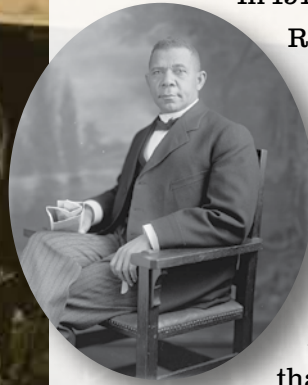
For 36 years, the school also served as the heart of Cape Charles' African American community. Whether hosting casual get-togethers or traditional events—like the annual May Day Festival—this historic building forged an unforgettable legacy in the lives of Cape Charles' Black families, many of whom continue to call the town their home.



Soon—and with your help—this treasured piece of Cape Charles' history will once again unite a remarkable community, one that today is inclusive, diverse, and open to everyone.



“All the other pleasures of life seem to wear out, but the pleasure of helping others in distress never does.”—Julius Rosenwald



In 1912, educator and author Booker T. Washington encouraged Julius Rosenwald, co-owner of Sears, Roebuck & Company, to collaborate with him and the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University). Their mission? To improve the quality of public education for African American children in the South.

They did this by building schools. Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund contributed more than \$4.3 million, while the African American communities served by the schools raised more than \$4.7 million. Twenty years later, their collaboration had produced 4,977 Rosenwald Schools.



The Cape Charles Rosenwald School, which opened in 1930, served first through seventh grades in four classrooms. Odelle Johnson Collins, who attended the school from 1944 to 1951, appreciates the solid foundation it gave her.

“Regardless of how far your parents went in school,” she explains, “you knew that you had to go to school. And they kept before you that education was the most important thing.”

John Nottingham taught at the school from 1959 to 1964. “The students had a very strong desire to learn,” he says. “That may be because of the conditions in which they were living. Never have I seen such students who were willing and eager to learn.”

Decades later, when segregation ended and the Rosenwald Schools eventually closed, many of the buildings fell into disuse or were sold. Because most of

the structures were of clapboard construction, fewer than 500 Rosenwald Schools remain standing today.

The Cape Charles Rosenwald School is one of them. Although the school closed in 1966, the brick structure endures as a testament to the importance of Rosenwald Schools in our nation’s history.

In 1958, as she was about to graduate from the Cape Charles school, 13-year-old Patricia Beach reigned as May Queen at the May Day Festival. Sixty-two years later, after a long career as a guidance counselor in public schools, Ms. Beach returned with her husband to her beloved Cape Charles.



“When I shared with one of my friends that I went to a Rosenwald School,” Ms. Beach says, “she said she went to one, too. But unfortunately, hers had collapsed the previous year. I’m delighted that ours is still standing, and I think it’s important to preserve this wonderful resource.”

To that end, former students and faculty have joined with community leaders in a crucial mission: safeguarding the building’s legacy. In 2012, they formed the Cape Charles Rosenwald School Restoration Initiative, Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that raised enough money to purchase the property in 2019.

Their goal? Creating a modern-day community center that will inspire, educate, and connect all cultures in Cape Charles.

“I began learning long ago that those who are happiest are those who do the most for others.”

—Booker T. Washington

Rosenwald Schools have been designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as among the nation’s most endangered historic sites. The Cape Charles school remains on Preservation Virginia’s list of the state’s Most Endangered Historical Places. That’s why after buying the property, the CCRSRI alliance took steps to have the school placed on the U. S. Department of Interior’s National Register of Historic Places.

Then, alliance members agreed on a guiding principle in the school’s restoration: retrieving and recapturing the original school design for adaptive re-use.

Next, they devised a vision to create a vibrant and self-sustaining community center, one that will showcase the building’s rich history and provide opportunities for engagement, connection, and education.

The restored landmark will again be home to educational programs and community gatherings. As a 21st century community center, it will support Cape Charles’ revitalization and the Eastern Shore in vital ways: through workforce training in cooperation with Eastern Shore Community College,



as a business incubator, technology hub, and performance venue with exhibition space, a community kitchen, walking trails, and other valuable amenities.

“This is a wonderful opportunity to bring the people of Cape Charles together,” Ms. Beach says.

The alliance also developed a financial plan for the community center. This ensures that it will generate enough revenue to be self-sustaining and serve as a source of pride for the Town of Cape Charles.

With the vision and financial strategy in place, an architectural plan was drafted, transforming the former school into a community center. What’s the next step? A capital campaign.

To buy the school building and its 2.5 acres in 2019, the CCRSRI alliance raised \$300,000. The Town of Cape Charles confirmed its commitment to the project by donating 6.3 acres adjacent to the school property. Now, at least \$2 million is needed to restore the building and make improvements to its 8.8-acre campus.

In November 2022, when the alliance held a meeting to update the community on all of its progress, Patricia Beach was there.

“The beauty of the spirit in that room was inspiring,” she says. “These are folks who are willing to dedicate their professional expertise to giving back. This project is a much-needed way to commemorate the legacy that came out of that school.”



“This is a wonderful opportunity to bring the people of Cape Charles together.”

—Patricia Beach

Maybe you think that one gift, like one brick, is insignificant. But it was brick by brick that Cape Charles Rosenwald School rose to stand strong for decades.

In the same way, it is through each and every gift that this campaign will reach its goal. Please, help bring this cherished piece of Cape Charles' history back to life.

May we count on you for a gift?



Cape Charles Rosenwald School
Restoration Initiative

Post Office Box 294
Cape Charles, Virginia 23310

ccrosenwaldschool.org

The CCRSRI is a public charity recognized as tax-exempt by the IRS under Section 501(c)3, Tax ID# 27-4056712. A financial statement is available upon request to the CCRSRI or a written request to the Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs of the Division of Consumer Protection, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services of the Commonwealth of Virginia.
Photo courtesy of Gordon Campbell