

Working History Franklin County Training School:

The Porch Building was a 1951 addition to Franklin County Training School for African Americans that opened in 1928 in Louisburg, North Carolina. The school was partially funded under the Rosenwald Fund. Julius Rosenwald, the owner of Sears Roebuck Company and a philanthropist, established a fund in 1917 that financed the construction of more than 5,300 schools and accessory buildings for the education of African-Americans in 15 southern states, of those 813 were constructed in North Carolina (more than any other state).

“The Rosenwald Fund only financed 1/3 of the construction of the school buildings and required the local government or school system and the black community raise the 2/3 balance.”

At the time the Fund was established, Julius Rosenwald was a member of the Trustees of Tuskegee Institute and it was through the encouragement of Booker T. Washington that Rosenwald started the Fund and the first rural schoolhouses were constructed in Alabama. When the Fund closed in 1932 it had raised \$4.7 million to advance the education of African-Americans, and then sold its plans to the Work Progress Administration (WPA) that continued to construct school buildings on similar plans of those under the Rosenwald Fund.

Many of those buildings funded under the Rosenwald Fund have since been destroyed or abandoned. The remaining buildings are in danger of becoming extinct. There has been an on-going push by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Organizations, and local preservation organizations to preserve or restore as many Rosenwald buildings as possible. In 2003 the National Trust requested that Mr.

Angelo Franceschina of the Rural Initiative project prepare an application to place the Rosenwald building on the endangered building list. The application was successful and the recognition put the Rosenwald Fund on a “national stage”.

The Rosenwald Fund assisted with the funding of one building on the Franklin County Training School campus. The structure, which became the main classroom building, was a 7-teacher unit at Franklin County Training School. That building burned down in the winter of 1960. Franklin County Training School was a product of a growing need for education of African-Americans in Franklin County in the 1920s. In 1925, Frank Fogg and John Sills approached the Franklin County Board of Education and made an offer of \$1,000 about possibly expanding the existing Colored School. This offer led to further research and ultimately the opening of Franklin County Training School. The Rosenwald Fund representatives agreed to provide \$400 toward the cost of the first classroom and \$200 for each additional classroom.

An additional \$500 was offered by the coordinator of the Rosenwald Fund from the Jeanes Fund to provide a source of funding for teacher salaries. All that was needed from that point was a two-acre plot to build the campus. The Franklin County Board of Education then selected a site on Cripple Creek Road, which is now West River Road where the Porch Building stands.

Working History/ Porch building:

In Louisburg, the Franklin County Training School was a direct result that led to the construction of the Porch Building as an expansion of its original campus.

The Porch Building was constructed as a project by World War II African American veterans from Franklin County who did not receive a diploma after being forced to serve

in WW II by the U. S. government. The work provided by Veterans was on a volunteer basis at no additional cost to Franklin County Board of Education. Participants were chosen based on the person's individual needs and interest. There were two driving purposes that fueled the project. The first was to give veterans a means of gaining construction experience to apply in the real-world work arena. The second reason was to provide a building at Franklin County Training School for vocational education. Due to an expanding student body, the structure was actually used for traditional core courses. The five-room Porch Building opened in August of 1951 and remained in use as classrooms in 1959 when the school was renamed Riverside Union School. During that time, the school was the primary education center for African Americans in grades 1-12. Grades 2-7 were taught at one point or another in the Porch Building. The late Carl A. Harris was the longest tenured principal for Franklin County Training School. Mr. Harris served as principal from 1938 through 1959 and remained principal at Riverside Union School from its beginning in 1959 through its end in 1968. At the school's peak in the 1960s, there were more than 1,500 students on the Riverside Campus. The Porch Building primarily served as a fifth-grade education center. The Riverside class of 1968 was the final class to graduate from the school. After the school system integrated, the Porch Building remained an integral part of what became Louisburg Elementary in the fall of 1969. Louisburg Elementary educated students in grades K-5 on the Riverside site until the December of 2000 when a new elementary school was built a few miles away. The Riverside Campus remained in use after the departure of Louisburg Elementary. Riverside Magnet School was formed under the direction of the Franklin County School System in the fall of 2001. Riverside Elementary Magnet School was then shut down in

the spring of 2006. The Riverside Campus is now the site for all Franklin County Schools central office. The Porch Building, although in need of renovations, is currently used for storage.

Why Veterans?

When male students turned 18 years of age, they were typically drafted to join the U. S. military during the World War II period. It did not matter if the students had finished high school; they were legally obligated to join the military. Many local veterans found themselves in a quandary when they returned home because they did not have a vocation or skill to land a job. Local African American veterans, mainly those seeking to be masons, were gathered to construct the Porch Building and a gymnasium as a learning exercise to earn job skills that may lead to employment. Both the gymnasium and Porch Building went on to be major pieces of the campus, but the gymnasium was eventually demolished. Funding for the materials to build the Porch Building was provided by the Franklin County Board of Education. However, the labor force was provided free by Veterans who attended FCTS. The Franklin County Board of Education provided \$50 thousand for this project.

Local significance:

According to the 1960 U. S. Census, there were more than 12,500 African Americans living in Franklin County. When the school's population peaked at more than 1,500 students, nearly 12 percent of all African Americans in the county attended the school. To this day, most African Americans over the age of 50, who grew up in Louisburg, were in some way associated with the school, and most had classes in the Porch Building. There are many community standouts that were educated there.

Eighty-four year-old Harold B. Green, who still lives in Louisburg and served in WW II, was not only educated on the campus when it was Franklin County Training School (1943 graduate), but taught and coached students at Riverside Campus from 1951 through 1968. Mr. Green is considered to know the most about the history of the campus. Mr. Green moved to Louisburg High School in 1969 after integration and returned to the Riverside Campus as principal of Louisburg Elementary School in 1971. He remained principal before retiring in 1988.

Current Director of Secondary Education for Franklin County Schools, Dr. Elizabeth Keith, attended Riverside High School until 1966. She went on to earn four degrees from four different universities. Bernard Hall, who attended as an elementary student and later graduated from Louisburg High School, went on to graduate from North Carolina State University and is now a member of the Board of Education. He served as chairman of the board for four years. Hall's mother Celia taught fifth grade on the campus from 1956 through 1978.

Mary Green Johnson, who is also a primary source of history for the Porch Building, is another community standout. Johnson, a 1963 graduate of Riverside Union School, is a member of the Louisburg Town Council and has been on the council for eight years. Johnson is a military retiree and served in the Army. She was a recruiter, trainer and inspector. She spent 23 years in the service.

Mary L. Hill, who is now 96-years of age, was a long-time teacher at both Franklin County Training School and Riverside Union School. She currently resides in Louisburg. She is among a very select few of the original teachers who are still living.

Rev. Sidney Dunston, who graduated from Riverside Union School in 1962, is a Franklin County political leader who serves on the Franklin County Board of Commissioners as a representative of one of seven districts in the county.

Terrell Lane Middle School, also located in Louisburg just a few miles from the Riverside Campus, is home for a handful of Riverside Union School graduates. Of those, current school Principal Novella Brown and Curriculum Resource Teacher Fannie Perry. Perry graduated from Riverside High School in 1965. Her father, Willie Perry, was one of the veterans who helped construct the Porch Building and the gymnasium. Mrs. Perry described life at Riverside High School as “very dynamic.” Mrs. Perry stated the classes had 40 or more children in them, and the school offered a variety of sports. Fannie graduated from Bennett College in Greensboro, N. C. with a degree in Mathematics Education.

The Franklin County Training School and Riverside Union School were crucial in helping educate the fine African American leaders listed in our document, and the Porch Building is the last structure standing remaining from the original Franklin County Training School and local education of African Americans during segregation. The renovation of the Porch Building is crucial to preserving that history.