Chapter One

Communities in Collaboration for the Nurture of Literacy: An Introduction

_In the South everyone knew his color and, hence, his place. On that Southern stage all actors were either white or black. They lived in two very real, very separate, and yet interwoven worlds._  Williamson, 1993

Education, race, economics, and the attitudes prevalent in the South in the decades following Reconstruction are inextricably related to the present study of American schools and libraries during the 1930’s. The American South can be defined through its predominant rural life style, through its caste society, and through its resistance to provision of adequate educational facilities for its children, but most significantly, it can be defined through its racial problem. The issues surrounding the emancipation of slaves and how they would be assimilated into society or kept at arms’ length were at the root of the socioeconomic and educational life at all levels of southern society.
The Rural South, Jim Crow, and Southern Progressivism

The South’s economic, social and financial structures were based on cash crops, extractive industries, and a large unskilled labor force (King, 1980). The South of the early twentieth century defined by historian Vance (1932) was a region of farmers and farm workers who were barely supported by agriculture. Per capita annual income was less than half that of the rest of the United States and masses of black and whites were migrating to other regions in hopes of finding employment. Cotton, the major cash crop, controlled the routine of the early twentieth century Southern rural lifestyle with a cycle of tenancy at the heart of farmers’ lives (Tindall, 1967). Cotton farming required intensive manpower and the high birth rate of tenant farmers met this need (Ramsdell, 1934).

The tenant farmers of both races were the victims as well as the supporters of the economy that gave large landowners control over large parcels of land and the power to exploit laborers. The tenant farmers were near the bottom of the southern social hierarchy as well as the poorest residents. They were reliant on the landowners to furnish their planting needs but the costs for their dependence were frequently inflated by double digit interest rates (Poe, 1935).

Nine of ten black Americans lived in the South in 1917; about three-fourths of them in rural areas (Litmack, 1998). Rural life for them was more difficult than
for whites. It was philosophically accepted by whites of all classes in the South that blacks were an inferior race. That philosophy was made into practice through the laws and customs of Jim Crow.

Jim Crow was a system of racial segregation based on the notion of white supremacy. It was an intricate and fluid system of laws and customs that was different in intensity from place to place but was used throughout the region to keep African Americans at the lowest socioeconomic level (Fredrickson, 2002).

Jim Crow laws dictated the normative social and legal standards in the South. Reactionary white citizens also used the Jim Crow traditions to support their vigilante activities, i.e., house burnings and lynchings. Whites were determined to keep blacks from enjoying the privileges of American citizenship (Packard, 2002).

The practice of Jim Crow required a dual system of institutions; there were separate facilities in both the public and private spheres. The need for separate institutions and approximate the same number of whites and blacks strained the limited funding localities had with which to fund schools. The dual services dictated for the two races presented particular financial difficulty in the rural areas where nearly two-thirds of the southern population lived in 1939. The fact that almost half of the South Carolina’s population in 1930 was younger than
twenty years old added to the burden of financing, staffing, and maintaining two systems of educational institutions (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

White southerners did not value the notion of universal education for the laboring classes. This lack of interest in providing education for workers’ children combined with the belief in white supremacy and the whites’ control of school funds resulted in unequal educational opportunities for blacks and whites as well as for rural and urban children. It was long after elementary schools were commonly available for children throughout the nation before schools for rural southern blacks were established, largely through the efforts of the black communities (Anderson, 1988).

It is Anderson’s (1988) argument that black children did not choose to work rather than to attend school, but that they worked because there were not schools available for them. He further argues that in communities where schooling was accessible to their children, black parents would do without the children’s financial contribution to allow them to attend school.

The racial tension that increased in the South following the Civil War, made regional rehabilitation and reform elusive. The developing southern middle class viewed dual facilities as the means to solve the racial problem (Grantham, 1983). Endeavors aimed at progressive reform allowed the middle class to define conditions for both blacks and whites. Their control of social conditions was
based on white supremacy. It was acceptable for blacks to improve themselves provided that whites authorized the chances to improve. Unfortunately, the control resulted in separate but unequal institutions as well as more intense animosity between the races (Link, 1992).

Schools for both black and white children were run by whites (McGerr, 2003). White education leaders believed that a vocational training and domestic arts curriculum was adequate for blacks as it would prepare them for menial work and limited chance of social and economic uplift. The industrial arts curriculum supported the white perception that blacks could not learn as well whites and it also supported their perception that they were meeting their responsibility of schooling black students (Anderson & Moss, 1999, p. 28).

The industrial arts curriculum was a source of controversy among educated blacks. Booker T. Washington contended that blacks who could work as skilled laborers could move into the middle class. He further argued that industrial education also kept whites’ criticism at bay and allowed blacks to go to school (Link, 1986). W. E. B. DuBois, on the other hand, argued that industrial education prevented blacks from developing in all dimensions (DuBois, 1903).

Another focus of southern reform was on uplift that would actually alleviate poverty and disfranchisement. This Christian based effort to improve the lives of
the poor stemmed from pastors and seminarians who called on Christians to act on their desire for social justice in their communities (Cash, 1941).

Southern blacks were interested and active in progressive reform; they were not just on the receiving end of charitable reform (Anderson & Moss, 1999). Blacks contributed millions of dollars in self-help. As an example of self help associated with northern philanthropy, James D. Anderson (1988) argues that the Rosenwald school building program was successful because of the efforts of the black communities.

Anderson (1988) also contends that blacks were accustomed to paying taxes to the government while simultaneously contributing privately to the schooling of their own children. This double taxation provides evidence of the blacks’ desire to secure education for the next generation. Northern philanthropy added fuel to the black self-help movement in existence.

Emancipation changed the legal status of blacks from slaves to free people but it did nothing to improve their living conditions. The former slaves were resented and socially not accepted by whites despite the Constitutional amendment that made them citizens. The blacks’ distrust of whites was heightened by the actions of the Ku Klux Klan and other vigilantes (Pipkin, 1934).
The southerners’ desire to continue life in the early twentieth century as they perceived it to be in the colonial days supported the planter ideal that was the standard for upward mobility. Mill life was viewed as contrasting the ideal life (Den Hollander, 1934). White southerners viewed mill work as disgraceful. They actually victimized victims by assuming that mill workers had lost their land due to a poor work ethic or poor farming practice (Edgar, 1998).

Working in a cotton mill was at the lowest social level for whites. It was both degrading and economically enslaving to live in a mill village. Those who worked in a cotton mill were unlikely to ever be landowners with the power and wealth associated with it (Herring, 1935).

Libraries and Schools in the South

The Jim Crow dictate for dual school systems applied to libraries as well during the first third of the twentieth century. The need for dual institutions was difficult to satisfy as the South struggled to recuperate from economic aftermath of the Civil War. The psychological results of the war and Reconstruction suffered by whites either made them more determined to maintain antebellum conditions or to ignore the needs of blacks (Shockley, 1955).

Significantly, from 1926 to 1932 black access to public libraries in the southern states increased by 6.5% giving access to only 27% of the southern black
population (Hendrix, 1925). Access to print materials was further limited due to school libraries being scarce; those in existence had small collections and were not open year round. Hendrix’s (1925) study found that there was less than one volume available to each person in South Carolina as compared to about one volume available to each person in other southern states and five volumes available to person in the United States.

The Rosenwald Fund developed an arm to provide financial assistance to libraries in seven southern states. These institutions were charged with demonstrating best practices for regional public libraries. It is important to note that the goal of the Rosenwald Demonstration Libraries was to serve all races, both in towns and in the country (Shockley, 1955). There were two Rosenwald Demonstration Libraries in South Carolina: one in Richland County and the other in Charleston County (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

Prior to 1935 local government controlled library development but there were only three regional libraries. By 1941 through the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal program, there were nearly four hundred library units for white South Carolinians but only twenty-five for African Americans in the state (Stanford, 1944).

The depressed agriculture-dependent southern economy meant very little public funding for schools. One-room schools dotted the rural south; these were
generally in old houses or other vacant buildings. All children of public school age studied in the one classroom with minimal materials. In most of these schools the teachers were likely teen-age women who probably had not completed high school herself (Maxcy, 1981).

Educational achievement in the South was inadequate as indicated by the low literacy rate of whites and the even lower rate of blacks. Wilson and Wight (1935) found four obstacles to school success in the rural South. First, the cultural circumstances in the rural areas had changed very little from colonial days making the area stagnant resulting in an educational lag. Second, there were more children and fewer adults in the region, making it difficult to provide buildings and staff for schools. Third, government had to provide and administer two sets of buildings, staffs, and materials for two races of children’s schools. Fourth, authorities had to work with low accumulated wealth and current income which allowed only small capital investments to be made in schools. Low expenditure on public education resulted in shorter school terms, low teacher salaries, scarce equipment and supplies, and undereducated students.

Lack of materials for teacher and student use in southern schools was a significant deterrent to educating black children. That South Carolina public schools spent only $788 on books in the entire state during school year 1931-32
magnifies the poor provision of black schools. The lack of materials is further complicated by the fact that public libraries for blacks were virtually non-existent (Johnson & Lewis, 1971). Without access to books and materials, students could not learn different reading approaches and clearly, their academic development could not be multidimensional (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

Reform of education in the South for blacks ran a similar course as it did for whites: school construction, school consolidation, curriculum improvements, teacher training, and extracurricular opportunities for students. The state agents for the General Education Board who were charged with representing the interests of the black population in state departments of education were generally white men. The board’s efforts to help with funding of black schools were typically manifested through raising matching funds from blacks and whites alike where buildings were needed. Maxcy (1981) further argues, “It should not be assumed that these schools were uniform or that they were equal to white secondary schools at that time” (p. 62). The high level of inequality is substantive of Goodenow’s (1975) argument that despite the changes, progressivism in the South was used to maintain Jim Crow and the economic exploitation and segregation of blacks.

Spending on education was widely diverse throughout South Carolina; it was in the rural districts that the financial cost of the dual system of schools was the
greatest. In South Carolina in 1915, according to Harlan (1958) there were 209,192 white children and 327,473 black children between the ages of five and eighteen. School expenditure averaged $12.37 to $1.00, white to black. Despite an increase in state spending on the average of 40% per year for the previous five years, “white schooling in 1915 was still inadequate for the industrial crises and world wars that lay ahead, but the Negro child had the additional handicap of unpreparedness to compete with local whites” (Harlan, 1958, p. 204).

Gleason’s (1941) study revealed that approximately twenty-two of the seventy-five public libraries in the South that offered service to blacks were housed in public schools. This was financially pragmatic; there was no facilities use charge and part time staff could be employed. The drawback to this collaboration was that libraries in schools did not reach adults and were only open during school hours (Gleason, 1941).

In some communities, the need for school library materials was addressed by the public library. Cooperation was given through (a) books deposited at the school for the exclusive use of the students; (b) special collections in the public library for the school children to use; and (c) special collection of professional literature for teachers in the public library (Gleason, 1941).

Faith that Sparks Action
Southerners during the early twentieth century were mainly Protestants. The tenets of the Christian faith encouraged action to improve the life circumstances of the disfranchised. Jewish ethics impacted southern reform through the Rosenwald Fund built by Julius Rosenwald.

According to Schwartz, (1999) Jews are compelled to practice good works. The good works are to be directed toward people of all races and religions. Jews are taught to live a life of compassion that leads to good works that will improve society (Meyerowitz, 1935).

Christianity is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and Christian ethics are somewhat different from Jewish ethics because Christian ethics are more centered on God and his character enacted through Jesus. All the commandments and teachings are a subset to the most important ethical tenet: to love God and fellow humans. The love in this command is not a static emotion but one that must be acted on. The ethics of Christianity demand practice of promoting the highest good of fellow humans as if it were the good of the self. Christ further taught that benevolence is not adequate without sympathy or empathy and that this love cannot be shared just with fellow church members, family, or those with the same socioeconomic status. Certainly this part of the teaching binds Christians to work for relief of the oppressed (Inge, 1930).
The Methodist Episcopal Church, South developed as a result of the schism in the American Methodist church over slavery (Auping, 1994). At the beginning of the twentieth century, two thirds of the southern Methodists lived in rural areas and worshipped in a tradition rooted in theology focused on God’s love and concern for people. Many Methodist women reinterpreted their Methodist beliefs in the early twentieth century to develop a strong conviction of the worthiness and dignity of individuals (McDowell, 1982).

The women of the Methodist Church spoke out against the actions of other whites who defined themselves as judge and jury in enforcement of Jim Crow. They argued that the violence of the Ku Klux Klan and lynchings would not eliminate the ignorance, immorality, and poverty they thought characterized African Americans. These active women acknowledged that the poor, both white and black, were in need of social improvement (McDowell, 1982).

At this time, women’s organizations in the primarily white Methodist church did not support racial integration. Their belief that education would secure equal opportunities for all Americans propelled their efforts for black school reform (Cameron, 1961). These reformers were supported by men in the church and by people outside the Methodist church in their endeavor to improve the circumstances of the oppressed but they did not attempt to force change that would result in social changes for the southern middle and upper classes.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between the Faith Cabin Libraries and the Rosenwald Schools in South Carolina from 1932 through 1943. These schools and libraries provided access to literacy during the days of racially defined dual system of institutions that meant less quality and quantity for blacks. Further, the purpose of the study is to investigate the motives of two white men, Julius Rosenwald and Willie Lee Buffington, who contributed to the uplift of rural southern blacks through their work in establishing the two educational institutions. Their efforts through education took place in a time when many whites endeavored to deny blacks the civil, social, and economic rights afforded white American citizens. Specifically, the study addressed four primary questions:

1. What motivated Julius Rosenwald to provide financial support for building schoolhouses for rural southern blacks during the first three decades of the twentieth century?

2. What motivated Willie Lee Buffington to dedicate significant time and effort to building libraries and acquiring books for the use of rural southern blacks beginning in 1932?

3. What was the relationship between the Rosenwald schools and the Faith Cabin libraries from 1932 to 1943?
4. What influence did this library-school relationship have on changes in communities for rural South Carolina blacks over this period of time?

The questions are not listed in a hierarchy of importance but are arranged in the order in which they are addressed by the researcher. It is critical to the study that the relationship between the institutions be explored in the light of the motivation of Rosenwald, founder of the school building program and of Buffington, founder of the Faith Cabin Library movement. In terms of flow of the study, the questions are coupled, numbers one and two and numbers three and four.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was supported by four relevant factors. First, the history of South Carolina schools and satellite educational organizations illuminated similar problematic issues of today and may enable policymakers to make more intelligent and reflective decisions. Second, educators should actively search out creative ways of disseminating knowledge based, in part, on the many lessons learned from our past. Third, good education is an asset in overcoming poverty, but educational opportunities have not been equal in South Carolina’s rural areas. Fourth, it is beneficial for rural communities, public
libraries, and public schools to collaborate for enhanced community culture and community health.

Research Designs and Methods

The purpose of this section is to describe the design of the study and the forms of inquiry and analysis used in the study.

Overview of the Design of the Study

A visual display of the study’s conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1. The Rosenwald schools and the Faith Cabin Libraries shared physical space and clientele from the communities in which they were located. Attributes such as community attitude, desire for literacy, and work ethic are also shared by the institutions. Both the schools and the libraries aimed at working within the community to providing an opportunity for learning to the community members.

The constant comparison method (LeComte & Preissle, 1993) and the first three steps of the historical method (Brickman, 1973) are used to address the questions in assessing primary and secondary documents. The present study also employs an inductive to deductive method as described by LeCompte and Preissle (1993). Analysis of the data illuminated the reasons behind Rosenwald’s
interest in and concern with education of southern blacks that led him to donate a large amount of his personal fortune and to use his privileged position among capitalists to influence their contributions to this cause. The data also elucidate motives for Buffington’s active interest in access to education for rural blacks in South Carolina during the era when Jim Crow delineated all aspects of southern life into categories of race. The relationship between the Rosenwald schools and the Faith Cabin Libraries in South Carolina from 1932-1943 is also clear from study of the data.

Limitations

There are three primary limitations addressed in this study: First, the geographical region included in the sampling; second, the location of the schools and libraries; third, the physical proximity of the schools and libraries.

Over seventy-five Faith Cabin Libraries were organized and stocked with books in Georgia as part of Willie Lee Buffington’s work. Most of the libraries in Georgia were located on Rosenwald school grounds or in the schools (Lee, 1991). This study did not examine the libraries established by Buffington beginning in 1944 in the state of Georgia.

In 1941, there were twenty-five Works Progress Administration (WPA) sponsored library programs for blacks in South Carolina. At the same time, there
were twenty-six Faith Cabin Libraries in South Carolina. Following the end of the WPA library projects in the State, the State Library Board was the primary agency charged with library development. The State Library Board did not initiate service to blacks until 1949 (Lee, 1991). This study was focused only on the Faith Cabin Libraries that extended service to rural blacks.

The foundation of Faith Cabin Libraries was based on Buffington’s desire that they would serve as a center for community activities. Therefore, Buffington made access to the libraries by adults a criterion for the grant-in-books. While the use of library facilities as a community center was not unique to Faith Cabin Libraries at the time, locating the libraries adjacent to or in the Rosenwald schools insured that there would be some staffing for the libraries and that children and adults could access the materials (Lee, 1991). The researcher in this study examined only those Faith Cabin Libraries that were near or in the Rosenwald school buildings.

This interpretive study is an effort by the researcher to recount the meanings the subjects gave to the reality around them through systematic identification of causal and consequential factors surrounding the historical events. Further, the present study is descriptive in that it documents the development of Faith Cabin Libraries in relationship with Rosenwald Schools in South Carolina from 1932 until 1943. The inductive to deductive process was employed appropriately as
the researcher began the study with an examination of the phenomena followed by successive and thorough examinations of similar and dissimilar phenomena.

Using the inductive to deductive process allowed the researcher to begin with the collected data and to build from the data theoretical categories and arguments drawn from the relationships discovered among the data. These theoretical categories provide data that explain the answers to the research questions (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993).

The researcher used an inductive process to discover a theory that explained the data. Examination of the Faith Cabin Libraries and the Rosenwald Schools in South Carolina was done through document review. The documents concerning the Faith Cabin Library are those archived in the South Caroliniana Library as well as those recently donated to the collection and processed for archiving by the researcher. A highlight of this present study is that the analysis of the documents is a more complete one than has been previously possible as new acquisitions have further illuminated the phenomenon of this string of libraries established to provide access to books to rural African-Americans in the Jim Crow days in South Carolina. These primary documents were written while Buffington was active with the library work and resulted from interviews with him and others involved in the movement. Additional documents relating the
history of libraries in the state and in the South were located for use in the present study.

The documents concerning the Rosenwald Schools in South Carolina are photocopies of those in the Rosenwald Fund Papers at Fisk University. These copies of photographs and texts were made by members of the South Carolina State Preservation Office as part of its effort to “identify, evaluate, and protect properties significant in South Carolina history” (South Carolina State Preservation Office, 2004). As suggested by Howell and Prevenier (2001) the photocopies were analyzed for “faults” (p. 61). These photocopies were clear and sharp appearing to have no faults due to mechanical failure or to voluntary manipulation. Other primary and secondary documents focusing on the Southern School Building Program, and schooling for blacks in South Carolina were included in the analysis. The data were accumulated, analyzed, and coded. The coded data were classified into theoretical categories based on relationships exposed from drilling through the data.

Application of the principles and practice of historiography legitimizes the study of the problems of educational history. Three steps from the historical method have particular applicability to resolving the research questions in this present study. The researcher was intentional in inclusion of data from studies done at the time of the historical phenomena to paint an accurate, and in some
instances, quantitative, picture of the setting in which the phenomena occurred. The sources were documents that were created during the time of the events that provide the focus of this study. Butchart (1986) defines a primary source and its value to the building of historical understanding:

Briefly, a primary source is any material created contemporaneously to an event being studied. A secondary source, on the other hand, is an account created subsequently; usually by a historian or other scholar, using a number of primary sources. (p. 35)

Brickman (1973) expounded on creating historical meaning through secondary sources:

The value of a secondary source is directly proportional to the extent to which it has made use of primary sources. Thus, a secondary source may incorporate accurate quotations from a primary source and, to that extent, it assumes primary characteristics. (p. 93)

Concept Definitions

As shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 1, this study involved three major concepts. Definitions of these concepts are outlined here in order to promote mutual understanding of the study. The first concept, Rosenwald schools,
refers to schools for southern rural blacks that were built with seed money from Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald or funneled through the Rosenwald Foundation during the American Progressive Era. (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

Q1
Julius Rosenwald
Motivation

Q2
Willie Lee Buffington
Motivation

Uplift
Religion
Capitalism
Training
Work Ethic

Q3
Library School Relationship

Q4
Rural South Community Changes

Community Building
Figure 1. Conceptual framework depicting the relationships between the Rosenwald funded schools and its founder, the relationship between the Faith Cabin Libraries and its founder, and the relationship between the two institutions and their impact on community building.

A second concept, Progressive Era, encompassed the first twenty years of the twentieth century (Edgar, 1998). This amorphous turn of the century political and social movement embraced complex reforms that were designed to promote public health and welfare, political democracy, and corporate regulations and to correct evils such as illiteracy, disease and poverty. Southern progressives became known for their adherence to strict delineation by race and class as a way to resolve the chronic struggle between whites and blacks. The delineation was manifested in an elaborate system of codified disenfranchisement and segregation, known as “Jim Crow.” The notion of white supremacy made racism and reform complementary.

The third concept, Faith Cabin Libraries, refers to thirty libraries established in rural African-American communities of South Carolina. The first six of the libraries were log cabins built on the campuses of Rosenwald schools; the second half dozen were built of other materials also located on Rosenwald school
campuses and most of the remainder of the libraries were situated within the Rosenwald school buildings. The cabins were built through community effort and stocked with books and materials donated by philanthropic groups around the nation. Organization of the community effort and acquisition and categorizing of the materials was done by Saluda County, South Carolina native, Willie Lee Buffington (Lee, 1991).

The fourth concept is relationships as it relates to schools and libraries since neither education nor literacy growth stop at the door of the school. Public Libraries in the United States of America, an influential report published in 1876, conveyed the message that public libraries were in partnership with educational institutions. A year later at the urging of the American Library Association, the National Education Association studied interrelationships between the two organizations resulting in their recommendation that cooperation continue between the organizations (Fitzgibbons, 2000).

Studies in three dissimilar states have shown that a strong library program is related to increased student learning and higher scores on standardized tests regardless of the community social and economic climate. (Hamilton-Pennel, Lance, Rodney, & Hainer, 2000). Fitzgibbons (2001) views the school and the library as having equal importance in providing for the needs for all young people. The needs are delineated to include education and literacy. She further
argues that schools and libraries structure learning and that if the institutions share common goals for the community, they could offer complementary programming in order to carry out this primary responsibility (Fitzgibbons, 2001).

This present study focused on the relationship between Faith Cabin Libraries and Rosenwald Schools in light of the motivation of the founders of the two institutions who were both white men with an interest in the educational uplift of southern rural blacks in the first third of the twentieth century. The product of the study is a remarkable story of the reasons for and the results of their interests in the oppressed.

Organization of Study

Chapter One is an introduction to the topic studied. It also offers an overview of education for rural southern blacks during the first three decades of the twentieth century, terminology, and reasons supporting the study.

Chapter Two is a critical review of historical descriptions of the South at the beginning of the twentieth century. This review includes information on economic, educational, political, and religious aspects of life in the rural areas of the region.
Chapter Three contains a description of the methodology used to complete the study. The research questions and a discussion of the researcher’s work as a volunteer archival processor are also contained in the chapter.

Chapter Four is the presentation of the findings relating to the Faith Cabin Libraries in South Carolina that satisfy the research questions. Findings concerning Buffington, the movement’s originator are included.

Chapter Five describes the findings relating to the Rosenwald schools erected in South Carolina through the Southern Schools Building Program of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Findings related to the Fund’s benefactor, Julius Rosenwald, are included.

Chapter Six summarizes the findings of the research. Conclusions drawn from the data by the researcher are expressed in this chapter as are suggestions for future studies.