

## Chapter Six

### Communities in Collaboration for the Nurture of Literacy: Major Points, Virtues, and Suggestions for Future Research

*Sometimes when I am on my wagon, I look at the children coming from school, and I say 'If I had had that opportunity when I was coming up I would be "sons of thunder."'* Former Tennessee Slave (Rawick, 1979)

#### Introduction

Formal learning was made difficult, if not impossible, for rural southern blacks by the Jim Crow customs and laws. This system of disfranchisement physically denied access to thousands of blacks to libraries in the early twentieth century. The dual system of schools that resulted from the Jim Crow system meant that schools for black children were substandard to schools in other regions of the country and inferior to those serving white students.

Wilson and Wight (1935) found that while library service extended to whites throughout the south ranged from fifteen to forty-five percent, less than twenty percent of the black citizens had any access to libraries. Sixty-seven percent of the blacks in the nation lived in the south at the time and made up a third of the

population. Seventy percent of the southern population, blacks and whites, lived in rural areas during the first third of the twentieth century. Considering these demographic findings, it is clear that rural blacks did not have opportunity to use libraries.

School classes for blacks were held in abandoned buildings, churches, or lodge halls. The buildings were often poorly maintained having leaking roofs and gaps in the walls that did little to keep out wind and rain. Many of the students walked miles to the buildings that were not heated and had little equipment, furniture or textbooks. The schools averaged four month terms in 1917 and the average teacher had completed the eighth grade (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

There were efforts to increase literacy in the rural south and some of these movements opened doors of accessibility for blacks. This present study focuses on the Rosenwald Southern School Building Program and the Faith Cabin Library movement in South Carolina, their relationship, and their impact on the nurture of literacy in the state's rural communities.

### *Focus of the Study*

The researcher began with limited knowledge of the locations of the Faith Cabin Libraries in South Carolina as well as the locations of many of the Rosenwald Schools and without a definition or a clear idea of their relationship. The sources that were studied revealed that between the times of the Tuskegee supervision of Rosenwald schools, about 1915, until 1932, there were 467 Rosenwald schools built in the State. From 1932 until 1943, there were thirty

Faith Cabin Libraries established in South Carolina, twenty-eight of them on the campuses of Rosenwald schools. Of the twenty-eight libraries, most were actually housed in school buildings that served as centers of both educational and community activities.

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.

### *Methodology*

This study was done using an eclectic blend of ethnography, historiography, and biography. Ethnographic research for the present study is appropriate because it offers a means of describing an educational setting in its natural context. The learning environments can be viewed as they naturally occurred in

their context (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). The inductive to deductive process is 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. Historiography is a narration and interpretation of what happened at a particular time in the past (Breisach, 1994). The interpretation of events in the present study focuses on interpretation within historical context rather than a simple descriptive chronology of events.

Biographical research provides a blend to describe behavior and to illuminate the ways in which education and educational policy play out in people's lives (Kridel, 1998). This study combines biographical inquiry with ethnography and historiography to more clearly understand the founders of the Faith Cabin Library movement and the Rosenwald Schools. It is hoped that by clarifying the motives and purposes of these men the two educational institutions the research will shed light on the relationship between the two institutions.

Representative acts, words, and works from the paper trail left by the lives of these two men who so strongly desired to effect uplift for southern African-Americans are analyzed in the present study to determine the essence and results of this unique school-library phenomenon. The value of these myriad data sources are solidified by historicists such as Ron Butchart (1986) who defines

primary sources and their value to the building of necessary historical understanding. He notes:

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)

The following paragraphs summarize the findings of the present study as related to the four major research questions and detail the virtues of the two men on which the study focuses.

### The Motivation of Julius Rosenwald

To answer Research Question One: *What motivated Julius Rosenwald to provide financial support for building schoolhouses for rural southern blacks during the first three decades of the twentieth century?* a comprehensive look at Rosenwald's history and background is necessary. Very early on, capitalists such as Rosenwald developed a keen interest in reformation of the South through education for working class poor blacks and whites (Anderson & Moss, 1999).

The new industrialism that sprung up following the American Civil War created vast profits for the founders and leaders of the businesses and leaders (Anderson & Moss, 1999). By the beginning of the twentieth century, eight percent of the nation's population controlled more than three-quarters of the nation's assets (Sealander, 1997). As the number of immigrants and working class poor people grew in the United States, charity also expanded. Philanthropy became the social design to care for the human flotsam of capitalism (Werner, 1939). From 1892 to 1932, donations to charity increased over two billion dollars (McCarthy, 1982).

Werner (1939) suggests that interest in education generally was a natural choice for philanthropy because of the widespread belief that education would be the remedy for social ills. Others would argue that the foundation agendas did not serve as a means for equalizing social strata but instead the agenda was to continue the dominant class structure (Link, 1986).

Between 1903 and 1932 a new wave of philanthropic organizations was generated. This new group was built on the notion that scientific research would lead to efficient solutions to social problems. Of the private philanthropic funding arms in this second generation, Rosenwald was successful at evoking enthusiasm from the stakeholders in southern black education at a level not previously seen. While it was an unpopular national topic, the welfare of blacks was so important to Rosenwald that he gave of himself and his money and raised significant amounts of money from fellow capitalists (Werner, 1939). Rosenwald's largess was not bound by geographical boundary, race or religion (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

The Southern School Building Program began through Rosenwald's relationship with Booker T. Washington. Washington introduced Rosenwald to the deprecating situation in which southern rural black students were expected to obtain a formal education. It was abhorrent to Rosenwald that the schools were open an average of four months and that teachers were poorly educated themselves and drastically underpaid.

Washington received permission to use a small portion of Rosenwald's birthday gift to Tuskegee Institute to build six elementary schools in Alabama on the condition that the school authorities or the community match the allotment (Werner, 1939). It was Washington's hope that this new buildings would spur a

more formal school setting that would encourage more black children to attend classes (Dalin, 1998).

Rosenwald devised a scheme that was unique among foundations of the day. Both the community and the local school district were required to provide a matching grant in order to qualify for the Rosenwald aid. It was the benefactor's theory that the matching investment would develop habits that would serve to continue to work towards breaking the cycle of despairing poverty among blacks (Werner, 1939).

Between late 1912 and 1914, six one room schoolhouses were built and the requests for school buildings grew to the point that eight years later Rosenwald had to consult other prominent educators after Washington's death. These individuals devised a plan that allowed participation of other states in the construction program on the same conditions originally required in Alabama (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

Tuskegee was designated to coordinate the project and allotted \$400 for one room schools and \$500 for two room buildings. The local authorities would incorporate the new building into their school district and it was incumbent on the school district to equip and staff the school (Embree & Waxman, 1949). To complete the collaborative arrangement, the school system had to commit to operating the school a minimum of five months per year (Sosland, 1995).

Rosenwald was born in America to German Jewish immigrant parents. His father ran a clothing store. His formal education ended after two years in high school. At that time, he served an apprenticeship under his uncles who were leading New York clothing merchants (Werner, 1939).

The principles of Judaism were instilled in Rosenwald by his parents and his faith was a major influencing factor in his adult decision making. Rabbi Emil Hirsch of Chicago's Sinai Congregation where Rosenwald regularly attended services emphasized the importance of charity to stimulate self-help. Hirsch taught this to mean charity was best used to get jobs than to give them alms (Werner, 1939).

Rosenwald's expressed life goal early in his adulthood was to earn \$15,000 annually. Of that he would spend a third for his living expenses, he would save a third, and he would give a third to charity. By 1925, Rosenwald had met his salary goal so many times that his personal holdings were estimated to be \$150 million (Werner, 1939).

In 1895, Rosenwald bought into *Sears, Roebuck, and Company*, one of the businesses that was part of the characteristic commercial growth in the early 1900's (Werner, 1939). Rosenwald had been named president of the firm by 1908 and through improved technology, quality control, and customer service techniques had made the business the largest, most successful of the twenty-five

mail-order catalog operations in the nation by 1910 (Dalin, 1998). The company's sales volume allowed *Sears, Roebuck, and Company* to sell cheaper than other businesses thus effectively eliminating the competition (Werner, 1939).

Due to Rosenwald's belief that people need to contribute to their own improvement in order to fully appreciate improved status, he devised a plan for matching donations for the Southern School Building grants. The Rosenwald Fund would share with communities and local school authorities in building schools. It was the primary aim of Rosenwald's funding plan to stimulate acceptance of social responsibilities by public agencies. Rosenwald insisted that prejudice could not prevent bequeathing money to those who needed the assistance (Werner, 1939). Rosenwald adopted President Abraham Lincoln's strategic argument racial prejudice; a divided nation cannot stand. Rosenwald believed there was no greater cause than resolving divisive racial issues (Sosland, 1995, p. 13).

### Willie Lee Buffington's Motivation

In order to answer Research Question Two: *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?*, the researcher details the life and times of Buffington in the section below.

From 1932 to 1943 Buffington facilitated the establishment of twenty-eight libraries for use by African-Americans in connection with Rosenwald Schools. Two libraries, affiliated with Christian institutions of higher education were also established for black students in South Carolina. Buffington saw his work as a missionary means to develop attitudes and habits that would result in the uplift of the black community (Carter & Geil, 1943).

At the age of twelve, Buffington, of necessity, dropped out of school to work with his father as a sawyer. In November, 1925, Buffington left Saluda County, South Carolina for the first time in his life to go to the Martha Berry School in the neighboring State of Georgia where he could live and work his way through high school (Buffington, 1942). Buffington related to W. H. Styler in 1947 that it was his father who after having heard of the Martha Berry School made the arrangements for his son to attend. With \$3.85 in his pocket, Willie Lee traveled to Georgia.

The seventeen year old student was given several jobs before being placed in the school library where he had access to all the books—another first in his life. Reading opened the world to Buffington who had little experience aside from the daily struggles of survival. Books granted him access to the thinking of the both ancient and contemporary writers.

He contrasted this opportunity for unlimited learning with that of the people in his home community where very few families owned a Bible. He was aware that there were fewer books in the neighboring black community where he had many friends (Buffington, 1942).

During his tenure at Martha Berry School, Buffington's father wrote him every other week and his long time black friend and mentor, Simpkins, wrote to him monthly enclosing in his letters a dollar bill. This dollar was essentially all the pocket money Buffington had during the time he was at Berry (Buffington, 1942).

Simpkins' letters were encouraging and through them Buffington continued to live a Christian life, to work for his education, and to follow his dream to become a pastor (Brown, 1937). Buffington admitted that the gifts of letters and cash from a poor black man to a poor white man changed his life because he recognized the sacrificial nature of the mailings and he may have also recognized the nature of the reversed race relationship.

One of his Berry teachers, Ernest Hall Buell, later praised Buffington's work ethic and sincerity in pursuing his education (Buell, 1937). After two years of constant studying and working at Berry, Buffington became so ill from overwork that he was forced to go back home to his family in South Carolina. After an eight-month recuperation period he went to work in a textile mill (Buffington, 1942).

Buffington and Clara Rushton were married when Buffington was twenty-three years old and lived in Edgefield County, so he could work in the cotton mill (Department of Commerce--Bureau of the Census, 1930) for twelve dollars a week (Buffington, 1942). A year or two after moving to Edgefield, Buffington's long time friend, Simpkins, invited him to tour the new Rosenwald School in the Plum Branch community. While touring the new three-room schoolhouse, Buffington reflected on the differences between the new school facility and the two-room, two-teacher school for white children in Plum Branch which had books, shelves, displays, and other equipment and materials (Carr, 1958).

Buffington's prayers that he could help the black students and teachers were answered through a dream where he saw a cabin full of books on a familiar plot of land. Late in 1931, as he continued to wrangle with what to do to help the blacks, Buffington was reminded of his grandmother's adage, "A little bit, blessed by the Lord, goes a long way, Willie Lee. God makes the miracle" (Buffington, 1942).

A labor negotiation shortened his work shift from eleven to eight hours per day and the twenty-four year old Buffington took advantage of the extra time to return to public high school. Buffington described his educational experiences to Carr in 1958. After classes in the mornings, he walked home and then reported to work from 2 p.m. until 10 p.m. He studied after work hours. He graduated from

Saluda High School in 1935 and attended Furman College in Greenville, South Carolina, where he earned a baccalaureate degree in 1938.

Next, Buffington and his family relocated to Chester, Pennsylvania where he attended Crozer Theological Seminary, served on a church staff, and worked in the shipyard during the summers. In 1942, Buffington was awarded a Bachelor of Divinity from Crozer and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania. During the period of 1932-1942, while he worked, attended school, and began his family, Buffington embarked on a project that would impact thousands of rural South Carolinians (Carter & Geil, 1943).

Buffington acted on impulse in late 1931 by spending his last dime on five postage stamps for mailing letters he wrote to five ministers in different parts of the country. He simply asked each of the clergymen to send one book for the black school and if that was not possible he asked that they send him a stamp so that he could send a request to someone else (Carr, 1958).

Dr. L. H. King, pastor of a black congregation in New York City was the only one of the five to respond. His letter indicated that he knew of the conditions of southern rural blacks and that he had eight hundred books collected and would ship them to South Carolina (Buffington 1942).

More than 1,000 books were shipped to Buffington from this church congregation in Harlem (Buffington, 1942). The books were shipped in barrels

and were a collection of fiction, biography, religion, and textbooks. The number of books proved to be problematic because after selecting books to house in Simpkins' school, the men had no pragmatic plan to make the books accessible to the community nor could they locate a suitable place to store the remaining books (Carr, 1958). They called a community meeting in the Lockhart Baptist Church, the church where Simpkins taught a Bible class for men (Buffington, n. d.).

At that meeting, it was determined that this African-American community would do as they had done in the past; they would work together for the common good. The black community formulated plans to build a log cabin to serve as library.

Buffington's project was planned in the midst of the nation's Great Depression at a time when farm revenues were very low. (Buffington, n.d.) Even though no one had much extra money, the black community members contributed of their time and talents. Trees were cut into logs that was made into lumber; extra trees were sold to pay for other materials (Buffington, 1942). While they might not have been in a position to donate money or materials to the library project, the people in the community logged hundreds of labor hours into building the cabin.

The question of what to name the library came up in one of the community meetings that were on-going through the building process. A woman who could

neither read nor write suggested “Faith Cabin Library” based on the fact that at the outset of the project, the community had faith but no physical resources to use in building the library (Carr, 1958). The term also described both the faith that Simpkins had that the community’s new school building would be blessed with books and the faith that Buffington had that the books would be donated as a result of his five letters (Buffington, 1942).

The work of building the library was done around the crop cycle making the work “bees” community events. An old piano was converted to serve as a table (Sprinkle, 1948). The black women made chairs for the library out of barrels with cushions covered with a cotton upholstery fabric, cretonnes and they also sold barbecue hash at the gatherings and put the money in the library fund (Buffington, 1942).

Kerosene lamps were used to light the new library, as community was located five miles from the nearest power line. Buffington went through the donated books and magazines to cull those he considered “undesirable” (Carr, 1958, p. 15). The criteria used for culling books are not evident. There were sections for children’s books, for young people, for adults, and the religious materials were organized conveniently for use by black pastors in the area (Carr, 1958). There was a sign in this library and in the successive ones that read “Others” as a reminder to all patrons how the library had come about (Neal, 1959).

School recesses were timed to allow students to go to the library to listen to the radio that had been donated to the library by someone in Pennsylvania (Buffington, 1942). There were weekly reading clubs for adults and children alike. Children's clubs began on Sunday afternoons with prayer and singing before each child talked about the book he or she was reading (Buffington, 1942). A nickel per week was collected from children who could pay; the money was used to buy books written by African-Americans. There was storytelling and Buffington described Sunday afternoons as being particularly busy at the library to Jones in 1937.

Buffington told Beard (1933) that about a third of the books were in use all the time. During the down time of winter, the library was open for more hours during the week including Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Buffington said the school and community used the library facility virtually every day. They did have subscriptions to two magazines; other papers and magazines were out of date but still widely read (Carr, 1958).

Simpkins was named the superintendent of the library (Beard, 1933). Members of the school staff and the community were appointed to committees to look after all the phases of the library work. There were substantial gifts of books and a great desire in rural black communities for libraries. Beginning in the second year of the Plum Creek Faith Cabin Library, Buffington and Simpkins led

other leaders in developing plans for expanding the Faith Cabin Library movement to other rural South Carolina communities (Kuyper, 1933). Over the next ten years, twenty-nine more libraries were established in South Carolina.

### The Relationship between Rosenwald Schools and Faith Cabin Libraries

Research Question Three: *What was the relationship between the Rosenwald Schools and the Faith Cabin libraries from 1932 to 1942?* is addressed in the section below.

From 1913 through 1932, the Rosenwald Fund contributed to the construction of 5,357 school buildings in the South. The buildings housed 663,615 students; there were 15,000 teachers who worked in the universally named Rosenwald Schools. Forty percent of the black children, who attended school in the South during this period, went to school in a Rosenwald building.

From 1932 through 1943, Buffington orchestrated the establishment of twenty-eight libraries in South Carolina that were affiliated with Rosenwald Schools. The first five libraries were log cabins built on the Rosenwald campuses in Saluda, Newberry, Anderson, and Greenville counties. There were six more libraries built as independent structures on the Rosenwald School campuses; these were built of materials other than logs. Most of the remaining seventeen libraries were housed in the Rosenwald school buildings. These libraries were

available to thousands of adults and schoolchildren alike; the original unit served two thousand African American residents of Saluda County. The libraries served as community centers where black children, teens, and adults could satisfy intellectual needs and participate in social activities (Curtis, n.d.).

The school was most often the center of the community life and the libraries offered activities to enrich the community's citizens. The libraries scheduled hours so that adults and children could access the material. Plumb (1938) reported that some schools added other community-oriented facilities to the campus to enhance the local residents' lifestyles. The school organized activities around student use of the libraries. For example, Buffington (1942) recounted that the recess times at the Plum Branch School were scheduled around the radio broadcasted news reports; the students took their recess in the library to listen to the news.

The libraries were physically located at the schools that were centrally located within communities. African Americans in the community were required to contribute to the building of the Rosenwald School as well as to contribute to the establishment of the Faith Cabin Libraries. These two factors, as well as the fact that many blacks were desperate in their desire to provide education for their children meant that the libraries and schools were well used.

As the center of the black community, the facilities were used by all members of the community, children and adults. Being on the campus would have made adults feel comfortable in the facility perhaps encouraging them to use the library. The clubs that met in the library would have served as a vehicle for adults learning to read or improving their reading ability. Discussions held in the clubs and in the community would have become more expansive as adults and children were made more aware of world events through listening to the radio broadcasts in the library. The school and library as community center was also a means of enhancing the community's unity, which in turn, probably would increase the cultural capital of the people.

Speculatively, the school-library-community relationship prepared more rural blacks to reach for further education than would have done so without the effects of these educational facilities. There were several colleges in South Carolina at the time that were established for African American citizens. Graduates of these institutions were teachers, preachers, writers, bankers, and leaders in other professions. It could also be speculated that the educational offerings by these community developed and maintained educational facilities that as more rural blacks learned about the nation, more were encouraged to move away from the South in hopes of better employment and a better life. The rural blacks that lived in communities with Faith Cabin Libraries and Rosenwald schools must have

been better citizens as they became more aware of their rights and responsibilities as Americans; they must have also become more aware of the rights they were denied under Jim Crow. Their increased access to knowledge must have contributed to the discontent that fermented the Civil Rights Movement later in the twentieth century. It is certain that increased opportunity to learn and greater access to information changes individual and corporate expectations for life.

#### The Influence of the Schools and Libraries on Change

Research Question Four: *What influence did this library-school relationship have on changes in literacy and communities for rural South Carolina blacks over this period of time?* can be answered by considering that the Faith Cabin Libraries were a big step toward the realization of an American ideal, “becoming educated.”

Contemporary French theorist, Pierre Bourdieu argues that *cultural capital* is increased through individual learning and that this self-improvement increases an individual’s power (Swartz, 1997). If reading good books has been the foundation of the development of whites, Kuyper (1933) argued, it is likely even more important to the development of the African American people at this particular time. Establishing libraries in rural southern communities made learning accessible to individuals thereby increasing Bourdieu’s notion of

cultural capital for blacks. For example, the original unit, the Lizzie Koon Unit, served two thousand blacks (Kuyper, 1933).

These thirty libraries were modestly built but were very well stocked with books that Buffington considered to have “lasting value” (Sprinkle, 1948, p. 1). “Boys and girls are rejoicing in the opportunity given them for reading” (Beard, 1933, p. 1). Annie, a Faith Cabin patron, wrote, “Our library has made me a better citizen. Teaching me more about the country in which I live. I wish others, all over, could have a library like ours” (Plumb, 1938, p. 53). The woman who initiated the name, Faith Cabin Library for the first unit built in Plum Branch, learned to read in that library (Carr, 1958).

No one can measure the impact of ambitious young people reading a book about someone of their own race who achieved success (Kuyper, 1933). Children read books about black leaders who had to overcome great obstacles, i.e., Booker T. Washington and George W. Carver. At one children’s book club meeting early after the Lizzie Koon Unit was opened, a young boy began his report on Russell Conwell’s *Acres of Diamonds* with this introduction, “I’ve never been out of Saluda County, but this week, I took a trip way up to Philadelphia!” (Buffington, 1942, p. 49). Some of the units were given radios which opened the world of current events where newspapers were unknown (Styler, 1947).

According to Jones (1937) eighty percent of the eight million blacks in the South still had no access to libraries. The schools were without reference materials and textbooks. It was not uncommon for one student to read from the only textbook aloud while the other students listened. Teachers had no pedagogical materials or guidance for their professional development. The publication of articles about the Faith Cabin Libraries brought attention to the dearth of books and other materials accessible to rural southern blacks of the day. A school trustee was impressed with the orderliness and widespread use of a library. "I've taken the Negro schools for granted until now. I've just appointed the teachers and let them shift for themselves. From now on I'll take an active interest" (Buffington, 1942, p. 49).

Whites and blacks worked together to build the libraries. In many of the communities, a civic organization or church sponsored the building project. This experience of interracial cooperation to battle the inadequate opportunity for literacy for black citizens was enriching for the entire community (Sprinkle, 1948). The voluntary collaborative projects ushered in a new venue for interracial understanding (Beard, 1933). Many of the groups outside of South Carolina who collected and donated books were comprised of white people who had an inaccurate perception of blacks. Participation in the Faith Cabin Library project improved access to education for blacks but it also afforded opportunity to the

white donors to gain a deeper understanding of the status of disenfranchised blacks and whites (Jones, 1937).

The addition of Faith Cabin Libraries completed the requirements for two schools to meet accreditation standards (Jones, 1937). According to Buffington and reported by Brown (1937), the religious books gathered through church collections were used widely by preachers and church teachers. The contributions from public and college libraries widened the range of books made available through the libraries (Jones, 1937). Buffington recounted that a pastor in Seneca wrote that one of his teachers sent him to the Oberlin Unit to “dig for gold among the books. I found poetry, history, current events . . . thanks be to God for this gold mine! I can preach better sermons because of it” (Plumb, 1938, p. 18).

Unforeseen and unplanned side effects of the Faith Cabin Library movement were varied. Buffington’s inspiration to make the libraries “community projects” helped the citizens realize what they could do when working toward a common cause; the citizens felt the libraries were “peculiarly theirs” (Curtis, n.d, p. 12). Local blacks managed the operation and activities of the library. The libraries served as community centers where black children, teens, and adults could satisfy intellectual needs and participate in social activities (Curtis, n.d.). A school principal described how his community’s library became a community

center. "We are attempting to make it the first unit of a little community center. At present we are working on a tennis court" (Plumb, 1938, p. 53). One library devised a way of sharing their books with communities who did not have access. "Ours is known as a *traveling library*. It has served thousands of boys and girls, men and women, in the county" (Plumb, p. 53).

The library movement grew to be so popular that there were two communities who had arranged facilities before Buffington could collect books to fill their shelves. He told Plumb (1938) that he received requests for more libraries than he could honor. At one time in 1937, he had appeals from over a hundred communities who wanted libraries. Donors were eager to help. A librarian in a large library wrote Buffington that she had several hundred children's books to send but had no money to pay to ship the donation. Buffington did not have the freight money either so he had to refuse the books. The librarian responded that she would arrange to ship the books; this was the first of several shipments from that organization (Buffington, 1942).

The schools and libraries were the physical location of community development for those blacks who valued education but who had not had access to information. The influence on change, while not resolving the race problems in the South, provided basis for individuals and groups to begin thinking more progressively about the commonalities between ethnic groups. It increased trust

between whites and blacks as the work done by Rosenwald and Buffington demonstrated mutual interest on behalf of educational uplift.

Rosenwald's contributions increased acknowledgement from state and local authorities of their responsibility for providing schools for black children (Building Schools, 1923). Local and state participation in providing school buildings for black children increased as well. The first school was built in 1913 for a cost of \$942.50; almost thirty-two percent was paid by Rosenwald, thirty-seven percent was contributed by local whites, thirty-one percent given by local blacks, and no contribution was made to the building of the school by the government. The five thousandth school built by the Southern School Building Project was a six room brick building that cost \$20,000; eighty-two percent of the total cost was paid by tax funds, thirteen percent came from the Rosenwald Fund, and five percent was given by black and white citizens. (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

An unplanned result of the Rosenwald building program stimulated more than 10,000 schools built for white children. School authorities contacted the Rosenwald Fund administrators to obtain permission to use their building plans and in some communities the authorities even hired the same contractors to erect schools for white children (Sealander, 1997).

That both the Faith Cabin Libraries and the Rosenwald Schools were needed and were wanted by the African-American communities is evidenced by the rapid growth of each. In South Carolina, from about 1913 to 1932, almost 500 schools buildings were built with the backing of the Rosenwald money (Julius Rosenwald Fund, n.d.). From 1932 to 1943, thirty Faith Cabin libraries were raised and stocked with thousands of volumes for use by adults and students alike in rural communities around the State (Carr, 1958).

#### Discussion

Rosenwald died in 1932 as Buffington was beginning pursuit of his life's "grand consuming passion" (DeSalvo, 1997, p. 222). The two men were of different ethnic, economic social classes, and geographic backgrounds: one Jewish, the other Christian; one of middle-class upbringing, the other of lower-class; one from the urban Midwest and one from the rural South. Ironically, it was the working class poor Buffington who ultimately realized a graduate degree in higher education while the privileged Rosenwald settled for an apprenticeship that would make him a very wealthy man.

Rosenwald's compassion for blacks was related to the oppression of Jews and his belief in the efficacy of philanthropy to stimulate self-help. Buffington's empathy for rural black South Carolinians arose from having lived in community

with blacks and shared privations that accompanied the system of tenancy farming. Additionally, his black mentor spurred Buffington to action and by the distinct religious “call” he heard to bridge the racial divide in his own community.

Rosenwald had the option of continuing his education while Buffington dropped out of high school to help support his family and later return to college. With the help of his father and grandfather, Rosenwald became a member of the inner circle of American capitalist entrepreneurs and made a fortune in the mail order business at the turn of the twentieth century. Buffington became a pastor and professor who was admired and appreciated by those whose lives he touched. Despite all these differences, both Buffington and Rosenwald followed their convictions to contribute to the social and educational uplift of southern rural blacks at a time in our nation’s history when many whites endeavored to deny blacks and other persons of color the basic civil, social, and economic rights afforded most white American citizens.

Despite an overwhelming racial prejudice in the culture in which he grew up, Buffington believed that he was no different from his black sharecropping neighbors and in fact, he felt that he shared with them the experience of struggling for survival. His life on the farm gave him a contrasting perspective to the life he had as a mill worker where his time was spent with white working

class poor people. The contrast focused on the fact that despite their poverty in common with blacks, the white mill workers thought they were members of a higher social order than blacks. Diane McWhorten (2001) in *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama* calls this social attitude a “narcissism of small differences;” the closer one is in socioeconomic status, the more one hones in on small differences. Buffington recognized and used his unearned white privileges to further the nurture of literacy for disfranchised blacks.

His deep faith in God and in his fellow Christians was foundational for his life’s work in facilitating establishment of libraries in isolated, poor rural African-American communities in South Carolina. It was his goal through this work to build attitudes and habits that would change behavior that would result in community uplift.

While it is beyond the scope of the present study to document southern white opposition towards the Faith Cabin Library movement, some evidence has come to light that implies white resistance. Contributions from the Rosenwald School building fund were predicated on the condition that the local and state authorities supply staff, equipment, and materials to carry out the educational mission. These white authorities were also to take over the maintenance of the building upon its completion. Clearly, the authorities supplied only the bare necessities to the black schools or Buffington would not have been able to make

the contrast between the new Rosenwald School in the Plum Creek Community and the smaller, older, white school in the community.

The intent of the Rosenwald Demonstration Libraries was that local libraries would develop ways of offering access to library service to all persons; there were two of these in South Carolina in 1935. The Charleston County Demonstration Library had a per capita circulation rate of 5.3 books to the urban whites in the county and 1.1 books to the urban blacks in the county. These numbers compare to the per capita circulation rate of 5.7 books to the rural white population of Charleston County and 0.3 books to the county's rural black population; the white rural per capital circulation rate was nineteen times greater than the black rural circulation rate. The Richland County Demonstration Library circulation rates indicated that while they were more effective in reaching rural whites than the Charleston Library, they were not as effective in offering library service to the County's blacks. The per capita circulation rate was 9.9 books per urban white and 6.1 per rural white. The rate was 0.6 books per urban black and 0.2 per rural black; the rural white rate was thirty times greater than the rural black per capita rate (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

The interracial cooperation appears to have been primarily between blacks in the recipient community and the donors of the books. The donors did not challenge segregation nor is it evident that Buffington intended to confront South

Carolina's political system which supported the "intricate social minuet" (Edgar, 1998, p. 449) of the traditions and laws mandated by Jim Crow. Clearly, Buffington himself lived in such a way as to individually deny the autocracy of Jim Crow. It appears that those involved with providing Faith Cabin Libraries to rural communities were concerned that isolated, poor African-Americans have access to books that would provide religious, moral, and educational uplift.

The tradition of denying education to blacks through inequitable funding and access to facilities are the barriers that Buffington opposed. The Rosenwald Fund stipulation that local school authorities would equip and staff the school (Embree & Waxman, 1949) was seemingly not clearly defined and enforced adequately to overcome the inequalities of school funding under Jim Crow. Even with the Rosenwald grants, individuals in the rural black communities had to contribute money and time to provide adequate educational opportunity for their children.

Meanwhile, rural blacks were forced to take from meager annual incomes and contribute money to the construction and maintenance of public schools for black children because southern state and local governments refused to accept responsibility for black public education. (Anderson, 1988, p. 176)

The libraries established through Buffington's efforts are proof that big sums of money are not necessary to achieve one's goals. His acknowledgement of the

unjust racial divide, his deep love for God, and his compassion for his fellow citizens led Buffington to vigorously engage in his plan for educational uplift.

Rosenwald saw uplift of blacks from a national perspective rather than from a community and individual perspective. He was convinced that the nation could not make progress if an entire population of the population was denied educational opportunities. He said:

What I want to do is to try and cure the things that seem to be wrong. I do not underestimate the value of helping the underdog. That however, is not my chief concern, but rather the operation of cause and effect. I try to do the thing that will aid groups and masses rather than individuals. (Werner, 1939, p. viii)

In advocating for conditional giving, Rosenwald sought to stimulate public agencies to accept greater social responsibility; this was the primary aim of his philanthropy. Rosenwald's arrangement with the *Sears and Roebuck Company* to sell damaged hats and shoes to Tuskegee students at a discount (Werner, 1939) is indicative of his reticence to give anything to needy individuals. His fear of creating an entitlement culture among blacks and working class poor people shaped his philosophy of philanthropy that hinged on stimulation of self-help. He did provide toys for black children throughout schools in the South (Werner, 1939). This was apparently an indulgence both he and his wife enjoyed.

The philanthropist believed that human needs were human needs insisting that there was no place for religious and racial prejudice in bequeathing money to groups who needed it (Werner, 1939). Rosenwald expressed his keen interest in African-Americans:

I belong to a people who have known centuries of persecution, or whether it is because I am naturally inclined to sympathize with the oppressed, I have always felt keenly for the colored race. . . . the two races must occupy one country. They have to learn probably the highest and hardest of all arts, the art of living together with decency and forbearance. Nothing will so test the sincerities of our religion, our moral obligation, or even our common self-respect, as will the exigencies of this which is among the greatest of all our problems. (Werner, 1939, p. 122)

The Rosenwald Fund is ranked as the most influential benevolence of the time because of the corresponding assistance it generated from other sources (Bullock, 1967). From 1913 through 1932, the Rosenwald Fund had backed the construction of 5,357 school buildings in the South for a total cost of \$28,408,520. The buildings housed 663,615 students; there were 15,000 teachers working in the universally named Rosenwald Schools. Two-fifths of rural black children enrolled in schools were housed in Rosenwald-funded facilities or one-third of all blacks, aged 5-20, in rural, urban, public, and private schools in the fifteen

recipient states (Embree & Waxman, 1949). Rosenwald contributions increased acknowledgement from state and local authorities of their responsibility for providing schools for black children (Building Schools, 1923).

Local and state participation in providing school buildings for black children increased as well. The first school was built in 1913 for a cost of \$942.50; Rosenwald paid almost thirty-two percent, thirty-seven percent was contributed by local whites, thirty-one percent given by local blacks, and no contribution was made to the building of the school by the government. The five thousandth school built by the Southern School Building Project was a six room brick building that cost \$20,000; eighty-two percent of the total cost was paid by tax funds, thirteen percent came from the Rosenwald Fund, and five percent was given by black and white citizens. (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

Rosenwald and Buffington had strong religious beliefs that supported their work for rural blacks. Both of them were significantly affected by reading Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up from Slavery*. They championed their convictions in a way that was asynchronous with the popular ideology of their times. While neither set out to overtly confront Jim Crow, segregation or to change the social order of the South manifested in its system of dual institutions, they each made valuable contributions to lessening the racial divide, and their actions formed pavers in the road to dissolution of the Jim Crow system.

By making education more accessible to black individuals, Rosenwald and Buffington increased the cultural capital of the African-American community. Based on Bordieu's reasoning that culture adds to the wealth of a class, (Swartz, 1997) the educational opportunities extended by Rosenwald and Buffington to blacks in rural South Carolina and increased their life chances for success.

### Recommendations

The purpose of the present study is to provide information on the Faith Cabin Library phenomenon in South Carolina and to illustrate the relationship between the libraries and the Rosenwald Schools. The information included here organizes the scanty details of the Faith Cabin Library movement and the Rosenwald Schools and provides a chronology of the establishment of these institutions. The study also details the motivation of the movements' founders and documents and evaluates the depth of their work.

The intent of the researcher is to emphasize the type of community participation that made schooling accessible to rural southern blacks during the early to mid-twentieth century as the nation moved towards the end of Jim Crow laws and traditions. It is important to note that not only did outside philanthropic forces serve to enable a group of disenfranchised Americans to

realize a level of success, but also to remember and document the historic black community's involvement in its own educational uplift. Therefore, the present study, it also offers the contemporary southern black community a description of where they came from, how they responded to challenges, and where they drew support and wisdom. The historical black community's desire for education and the way in which it defined what schools and libraries could do is significant in illuminating our contemporary educational situation in the South. Examination of past local practices affords deeper perspective for considering today's issues.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

There is more information on community involvement in early twentieth century educational efforts in archives, county records, family papers, and sources yet to be identified. There are many people in South Carolina who have participated in community educational endeavors and social uplift for disenfranchised groups who have a story that should be told.

The work done by Julius Rosenwald and Willie Lee Buffington to provide educational uplift for rural southern blacks living under the autocracy of Jim Crow is quite remarkable. During this time, people of color were physically denied access to schools and libraries and as such they were also denied basic literacy and social and economic mobility.

Times have changed and from the work done by Rosenwald and Buffington along with many others. Today, schools and libraries are accessible to people of all races, creeds, social classes, and ethnicities. Indeed most school buildings have libraries and even the smallest American communities frequently have both schools and public libraries. While this convenience has not eliminated illiteracy and ill-preparation for competing and participating in today's global economy, it has certainly changed the way we think about access and equity to knowledge, technology, and information

Ogbu and Fordham (1986) argue that fictive kinship patterns and the fear of "acting white" explain why some blacks are undereducated in our contemporary society. This researcher suggests that further research be done regarding how to enable rural southerners, both black and white, to value our venues such as schools and libraries that enable us to be able to access to information, thus enhancing literacy, and economic and social mobility. In other words, how might we encourage and enable disenfranchised citizens to not only take advantage of the school and library systems in our communities, but also, to value them and to understand their critical relationship to knowledge access and the power that brings in our American culture and global economy?

Buffington controlled the text acquisitions that were donated to the Faith Cabin Libraries. The present study revealed that he went through the donated

books and materials and kept only those he deemed “suitable” for each library. There were no criteria identified for his culling. In all probability, the texts he considered “acceptable” were those that were consistent with his Christian traditions, values, and beliefs. Contemporary critical theorist, Michael Apple (1988) argues that textbooks are a control mechanism based on the biases of the writers and publishers. As such, the textbook writers and publishers decide what knowledge is “important to know” that is, legitimate and worthy of being passed on. While it is not within the scope of the present study to analyze the types of books and materials donated to the Faith Cabin Libraries, future, research into the volumes housed in the libraries would illuminate the nature of the texts and whether or not they were predominantly Judeo-Christian based and what the community’s reception of this literary material was.

Further, the Faith Cabin Library story should continue to be examined. As more information is made available, individual stories of changes in the lives of the people who had access to the libraries should be recorded. This might shed further light on the relationship between the Faith Cabin Libraries and the Rosenwald Schools as more information might be gleaned concerning individuals’ further education. Each community’s story of putting their library together should also be constructed. Inquiry into why more of the Rosenwald Schools did not have Faith Cabin Libraries should also be done. This research

would likely lead into study of the missionary arms of the Methodist Church.

This local educational history will expand the compelling story of the ubiquitous value of schools and libraries as well as the unique relationship between these two influential and important institutions in our American society.