

# Creating the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park

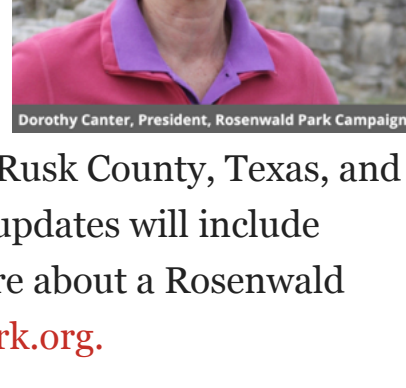


"All the other pleasures of life seem to wear out, but the pleasure of helping others in distress never does."  
 JULIUS ROSENWALD



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The **Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Act of 2020** became Law on January 13, 2021. This year the Campaign will be working to help ensure that the National Park Service conducts the special resource study mandated by the Law as expeditiously as possible to help hasten the creation of the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park.



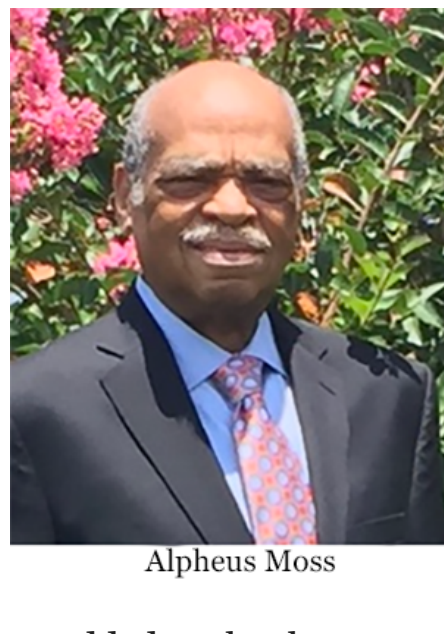
Dorothy Canter, President, Rosenwald Park Campaign

This Campaign Update focuses on two Rosenwald Schools, one in Rusk County, Texas, and the other in Prince George's County, Maryland. Future Campaign updates will include stories about other Rosenwald Schools. If you have a story to share about a Rosenwald School, we would love to see it. Please write to [info@rosenwaldpark.org](mailto:info@rosenwaldpark.org).

## CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL IN TEXAS: A ROSENWALD SCHOOL SEEKING RESTORATION

In 2005, Alpheus Moss was thumbing through a Houston Chronicle newspaper when his attention was caught by an article about a historic "Rosenwald" school building. From the description, it sounded like Concord, the school he had attended in Mount Enterprise in rural Rusk County, northeast of Houston. But, he had never heard of Rosenwald schools; neither, he discovered, had his six brothers who also had attended Concord. So, he called his mother, Othella. She had graduated from Concord in 1936 and knew the story of how the community had come together in 1924 to get it built.

Thus, began what Alpheus Moss calls a "deep dive" into the history of the high school he attended and of the Rosenwald school building program, more generally. According to his mother, the history of Concord School is tightly wound with the career of J. Frank Alexander and his wife, Lucinda, both longtime African American teachers in Rusk county. Mr. Alexander, who started teaching at the age of 18, initiated the fundraising drive to get the Concord School built, encouraged donations, and spent the last 26 years of his long career as principal at Concord. Initially, the three-teacher school had grades one through eight, but over the years, due in part to Mr. Alexander's insistence, the building was expanded and grades were added so that by 1941 Concord went through grade 12.

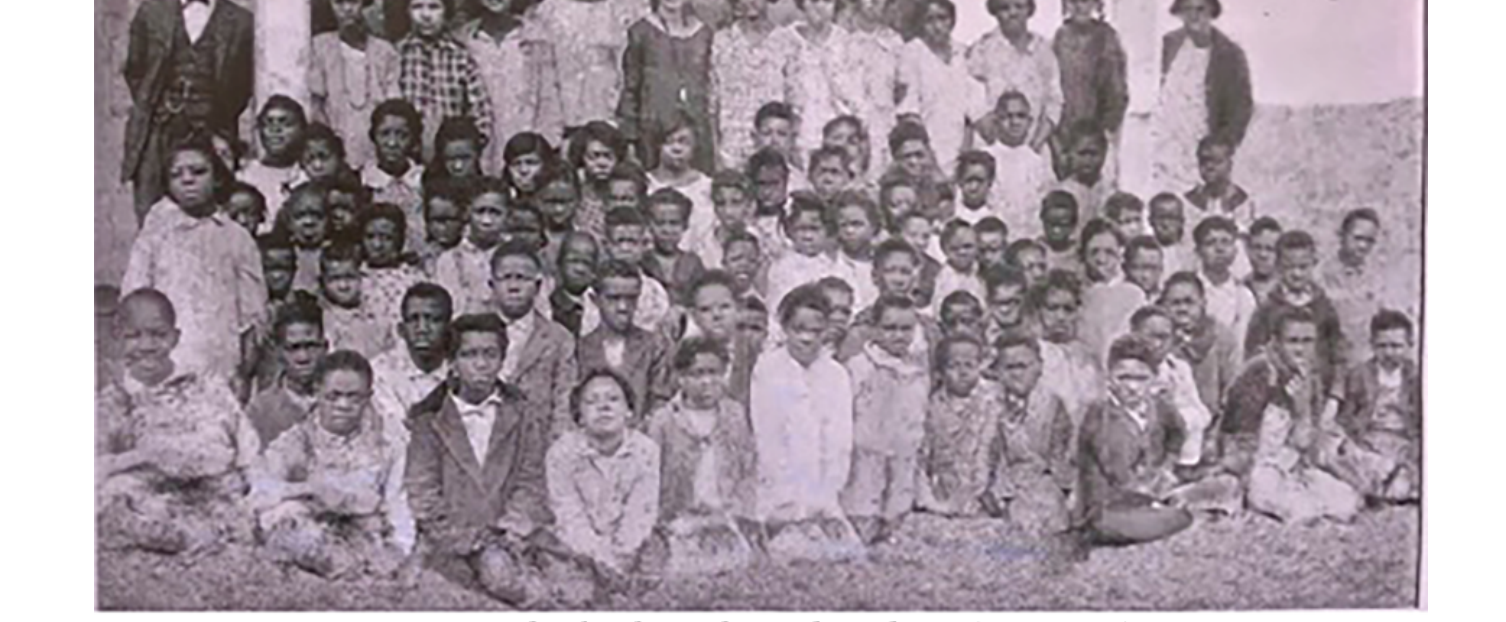


Alpheus Moss

The connections between the Moss family and Concord High School are deep. Alpheus's mother grew up in an adjoining school district but in 1930 her father was angered when that school hired a principal without a college degree. He then transferred his five school-aged children to Concord – a three-mile walk each way. Alpheus's father, Clinton, graduated from Concord and attended college at Texas College in Tyler. He returned to Concord as a math and science teacher and then served as principal before the school closed, due to desegregation, in 1971. Alpheus is the fifth of seven boys, all of whom attended Concord and then went on to college; five graduated, the other two, having been "bit by the love bug," went to work instead. Alpheus graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches with a major in accounting. He had a long career as an accountant in the oil and gas industries and is now retired. His mother, now 103, lives in Houston.

In 2006, Alpheus became president of the Concord High School Alumni Association. Two years later, he negotiated the purchase of the building, repair of damage due to hurricanes Rita and Ike, and basic preservation work. In 2013, a member of the Alumni Association donated \$50,000 towards a community center. Other donations totaling about \$150,000 allowed for the construction of a free-standing building next to the now boarded-up school.

Alpheus Moss has worked hard to build the alumni network, assembling the names of over 700 people who attended the school and every two years bringing many of them together for a reunion that includes a parade, a banquet, and a service at one of the local churches. The 2021 reunion will not take place because of the coronavirus. Alpheus Moss hopes there will be one the following year and still cherishes the idea of seeing Concord High School restored and telling its inspiring story.



Concord School Faculty and Students (circa 1928)

## FROM ROSENWALD SCHOOL TO VIBRANT MUSEUM: RIDGELEY SCHOOL'S STORY

In an interview outside Ridgeley Rosenwald School on November 7, 2020, Tiffany Williams Jennings discussed the nearly 100-year history of the school and the key role played by the Prince George's County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (PGCADST) in managing the restored museum that it has become.



The Ridgeley School

With assistance from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Ridgeley was constructed in 1927 as a two-room schoolhouse for African American elementary students. The two-acre parcel of land on which it sits was given to the Prince George's County Board of Education by Mary Eliza Ridgley, an African American woman. In the 1940s, a

third classroom was added. After desegregation, the school was used first as a storage facility, later as a special education center for children with special needs, and then as a school bus lot and management facility.

Between 2004 and 2009, a multi-agency workgroup led by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) developed a plan for the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of Ridgeley School. The group included historic preservationists, planners, community activists, and Mildred Ridgley Gray, an alumna of and educator at the school and the daughter of Mary Eliza Ridgley. With the support of multiple governmental agencies non-profit organizations and individuals, the school's restoration was completed in 2011.

Today, the Ridgeley Rosenwald School museum is managed by the Black History Program of the Prince George's County Department of Parks and Recreation of the MNCPPC. It is operated in partnership with the PGCADST, which provides programs for the community through its Ridgeley Rosenwald School Task Force. Chaired by Tiffany's mother, Mae Williams, the Task Force leads guided tours, hosts annual poster contests for elementary students and spring concerts, as well as numerous other activities. The Task Force's signature event is the Annual Black History Month Program that honors alumni and former teachers of Ridgeley School as well as the school's anniversary, this year its 94th. The program will take place on Sunday, February 28, 2021.



Restored classroom at Ridgeley School

Tiffany is a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta, the sorority founded in 1913 at Howard University to serve in the wider community beyond college. She has been involved with the Ridgeley School for many years both professionally and as a volunteer for the PGCADST Task Force. Tiffany noted that service is "in my blood." Her grandmother Della Hayden Jackson taught at three Rosenwald Schools and founded a library for African Americans in Polk County, North Carolina, at a time when no public libraries existed there. Her mother attended two different Rosenwald Schools in North Carolina and taught for 39 years at an elementary school in Washington, DC.

Tiffany is enthusiastic about the Rosenwald Park Campaign and believes that the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald need to be told in a National Park. Through the Ridgeley Rosenwald School and the Deltas, she knows many who have benefitted from his vision and philanthropy. And, like Rosenwald, she sees education as crucial to achieving a more just and equitable society.



Ridgeley Rosenwald School Task Force Members and Supporters – All are Deltas

## DID YOU KNOW?

Carter G. Woodson was a historian, writer, journalist, and founder of Negro History Week, which became Black History Month in 1976. The son of former slaves from Virginia, he had a lifelong passion and commitment to furthering the study of the history of African Americans. He received a BA degree from Berea College in Kentucky, a Master's from the University of Chicago, and was the second African American, after W. E. B. DuBois, to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. In 1915, in Chicago, Woodson founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. Julius Rosenwald was an early and steady supporter of his work. Dr. Woodson kept a photo of Rosenwald on the wall in his office at Howard University where he spent most of his career.



Woodson in his office with framed photo of Rosenwald on wall

Stephanie Deutsch, Editor

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**We need your support to continue.**

For questions and suggestions, please write to [info@rosenwaldpark.org](mailto:info@rosenwaldpark.org).