

# Creating the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park

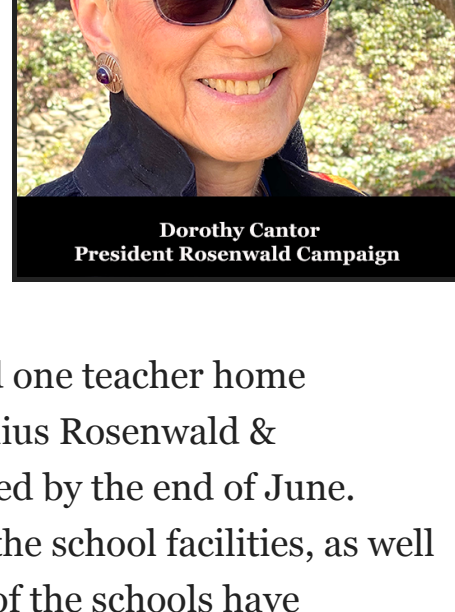


"All the other pleasures of life seem to wear out, but the pleasure of helping others in distress never does."  
JULIUS ROSENWALD



## President's Message

We are excited to announce the June 24 webinar that the Campaign is jointly sponsoring with the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) on Rosenwald Schools that will feature a presentation by Advisory Council member Andrew Feiler on his book "A Better Life for Their Children," followed by a panel discussion that will include Campaign board member Stephanie Deutsch and myself. Alan Spears, the Director of Cultural Resources at NPCA, will moderate the session. Stay tuned for more details on the webinar which will start at 3:00 pm ET.



Dorothy Canter  
President Rosenwald Campaign

Work continues on the report on the 55 Rosenwald Schools and one teacher home recommended to the Campaign for inclusion in the planned Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park, which will be issued by the end of June. Based upon the visits Campaign representatives made to 34 of the school facilities, as well as data amassed from other sources, we know that at least five of the schools have connections to the Civil Rights Movement. Further, several generations of one family played a key role in constructing, maintaining and then restoring a number of the schools. The Noble Hill School in Georgia, now the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center, exemplifies both of these connections. The Campaign is pleased to include an article in this newsletter on the generations of the Wheeler family that made all the difference for the Noble Hill School.

In this issue we also profile Jordan Tannenbaum, a committed Campaign board member, and include an article on Harry Kersey, Julius Rosenwald's chauffeur from 1914 until 1932. Our thanks to Lee Cromer, the niece of Mr. Kersey, and her daughter Alicia Ford, who provided the information and photograph that made the article possible.

Since the middle of April, five more organizations have officially expressed support for future legislation to create the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park, bringing the number to 49. We encourage more organizations to join the growing list of supporters by contacting me at [dorothycenter@rosenwaldpark.org](mailto:dorothycenter@rosenwaldpark.org).

The Campaign wishes all of you a happy, healthy and productive summer, as we resume in stages our lives in a world hopefully no longer dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

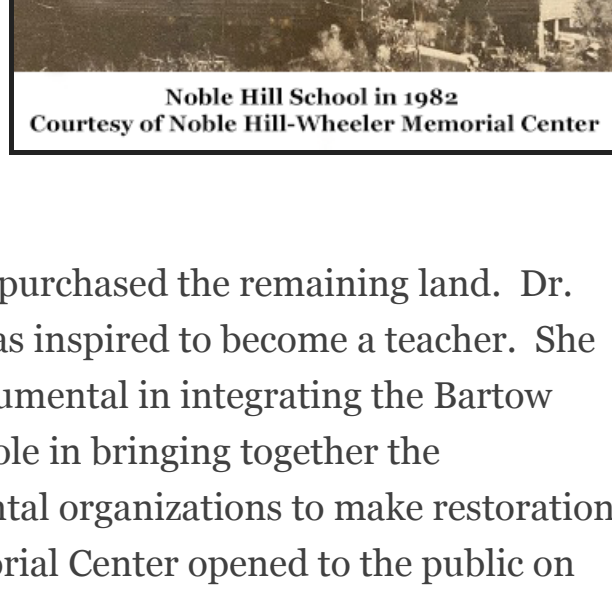
## The Noble Hill Rosenwald School and Beyond: A Century of Wheeler Stewardship

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Webster H. Wheeler, a farmer, and builder, left rural Georgia and migrated to Detroit where, like many others, he found well-paying work for the Ford Motor Company. In 1923 a letter from home told him about a plan to replace the old Cassville Colored School, which had been condemned in 1921, with the assistance of a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Wheeler returned to Georgia to help construct the Noble Hill School. Danny Harris, a neighbor, helped with the building, and Wheeler's son Bethel pitched in as well. Both the senior Wheeler and Harris became trustees of the new school.

A wooden structure built in accordance with Rosenwald Community School floor plan 2-C, Noble Hill was a two-teacher school with students in grades 1-3 in one classroom and grades 4-7 in the other. It was a typical Rosenwald school with neither electricity nor indoor plumbing and heat provided by a potbelly stove. The school was in continuous operation from 1923 until 1955, when the Bartow County School System consolidated all-Black elementary schools into the Bartow Elementary School.

Thereafter, the building was purchased first by the New Hope Baptist Church and then by Bethel Wheeler, who used it as a storage facility until his death in 1980.

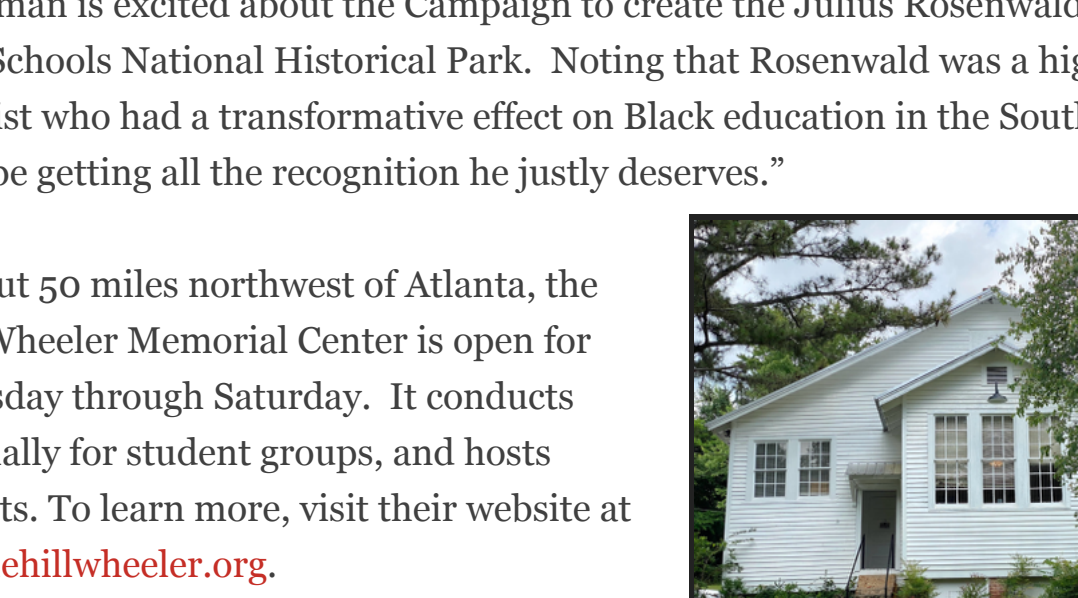
In 1983, neighbors and alumni came together to explore restoration of the vacant and dilapidated school building and its transformation into the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center, a heritage museum. Bertha Wheeler, Bethel's widow, donated the building and a portion of the property to the Center in memory of both her father-in-law and late husband.



Noble Hill School in 1982  
Courtesy of Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center

Dr. Susie Weems Wheeler and other family members purchased the remaining land. Dr. Wheeler had attended Noble Hill School where she was inspired to become a teacher. She had a distinguished career in education and was instrumental in integrating the Bartow County school system. She also played a prominent role in bringing together the community, former students, and relevant governmental organizations to make restoration of the school a reality. The Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center opened to the public on December 17, 1989.

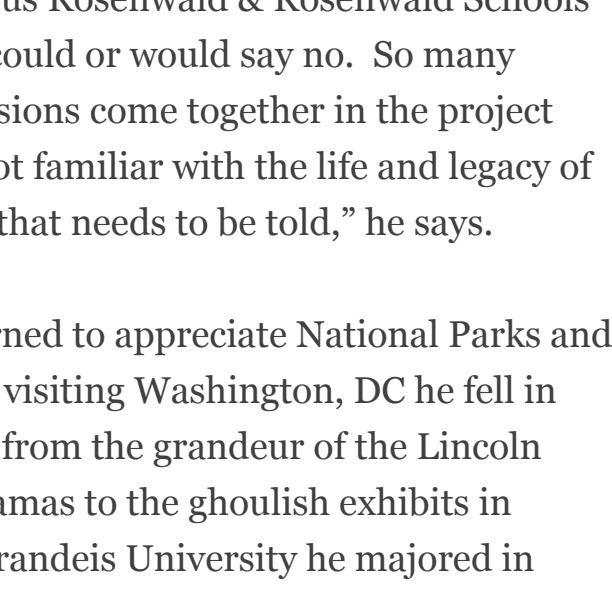
The current curator of the Center is Valerie Coleman, a great-great-granddaughter of Webster Wheeler. The previous curator was Marian Coleman, her aunt. Andrew Feiler's book, "A Better Life for Their Children," contains a photo of both women in one of the restored classrooms holding between them a framed photograph of Webster Wheeler taken shortly after his arrival in Detroit, one of many meaningful artifacts in the heritage center.



Valerie and Marian Coleman  
Courtesy of ©Andrew Feiler, andrewfeiler.com

Valerie Coleman is excited about the Campaign to create the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Noting that Rosenwald was a highly effective philanthropist who had a transformative effect on Black education in the South, she stated, "He should be getting all the recognition he justly deserves."

Located about 50 miles northwest of Atlanta, the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center is open for visitors Tuesday through Saturday. It conducts tours, especially for student groups, and hosts regular events. To learn more, visit their website at <https://noblehillwheeler.org>.



Exterior of Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center  
Courtesy of Dorothy Canter

## Profile of Jordan Tannenbaum

By Stephanie Deutsch

Jordan Tannenbaum remembers that when Dorothy Canter and Robert Stanton invited him to become part of the Campaign to create the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park there was simply no way he could or would say no. So many strands of his professional expertise and personal passions come together in the project that it seemed a perfect fit. And the fact that he was not familiar with the life and legacy of Rosenwald made the case even stronger. "It's a story that needs to be told," he says.

As a boy on camping trips with his family, Jordan learned to appreciate National Parks and their wealth of natural beauty and fascinating stories; visiting Washington, DC he fell in love with the city and with history. He took it all in -- from the grandeur of the Lincoln Memorial to the Smithsonian's American Indian dioramas to the ghoulish exhibits in the old Army Medical museum then on the Mall. At Brandeis University he majored in history with a particular focus on Native Americans and spent his junior year studying in Israel. As one of the first students invited to serve on the Brandeis Board of Trustees, he learned about management and networking, attending meetings in Palm Beach and Palm Springs. And an early job at the U.S. Advisory Council on Historic Preservation introduced him to the government's role in preserving and enhancing historical resources and promoting their sustainable use, a subject he pursued when he got a law degree from American University. For 27 years he served in the Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, often dealing with legal issues relating to historic sites on or near military bases. He now is a member of the Army Historical Foundation Board (which funded the new Army Museum at Ft. Belvoir) and the Fairfax County Historical Commission.



Jordan Tannenbaum

Since 2004 Jordan has been the Chief Development Officer at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a facility that hosts almost two million visitors a year and is an internationally known center of education, research, and scholarship, sustained by government funding and by private philanthropy. He is currently leading the largest fundraising effort in the D.C. area -- the "What You Do Matters" campaign to raise a billion dollars by the museum's 30th anniversary in April 2023.

As one who works closely with donors, Jordan Tannenbaum has become an ardent admirer of the way Julius Rosenwald put himself and his extraordinary business success into service for others and the public good. "Rosenwald's giving," he says, "was a remarkable union of the American practice of philanthropy as observed by French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830s and the ancient Jewish tradition of Tzedakah or charity. It served a purpose much larger than self."

Jordan is optimistic about the prospect of a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park and about the impact it will have, especially on young people. "This is a story," he says, "that they can engage in. It's a story of possibility and of hope."

## Julius Rosenwald: The View From the Front Seat

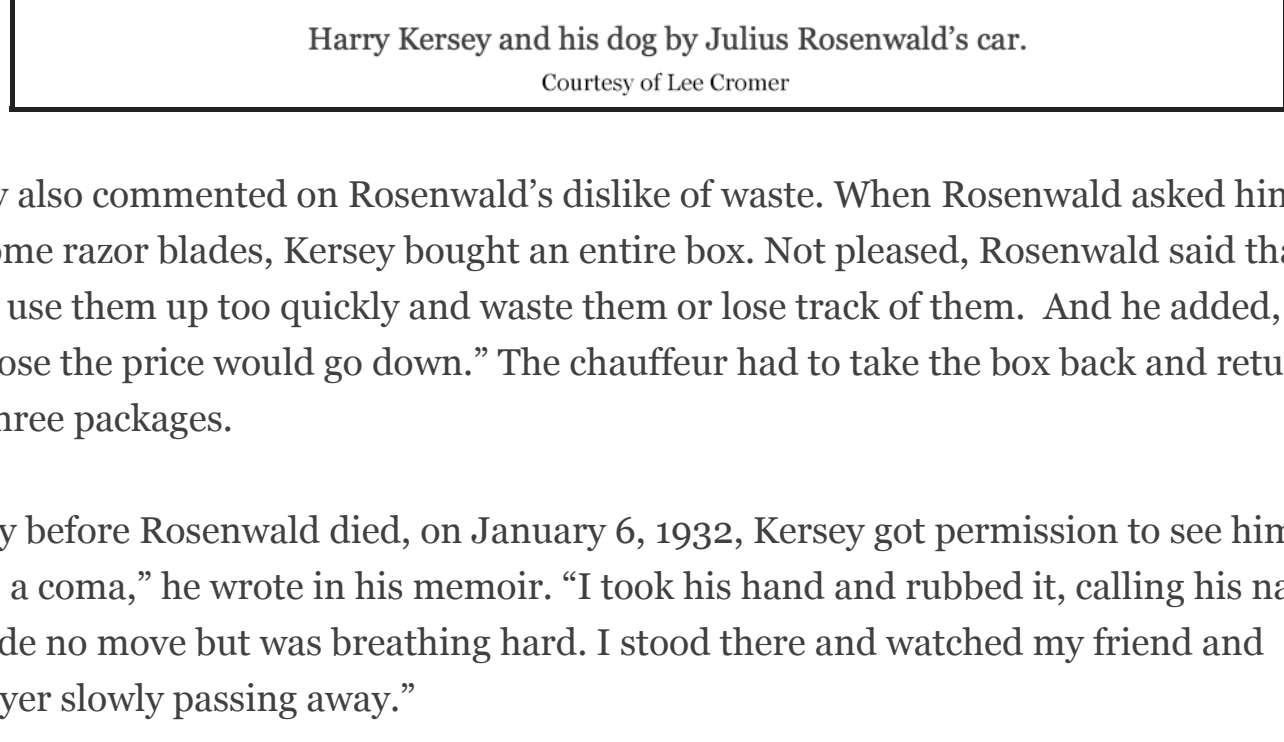
By Stephanie Deutsch and Dorothy Canter

From 1914 until his death in 1932, Julius Rosenwald was driven everywhere by his chauffeur, Harry Kersey.

Born in Canada, Kersey came to the US at age 14 and worked in a number of jobs before becoming a porter in the private railway car of B.A. Worthington, President of the Chicago & Alton Railroad. Automobiles were a new thing then, and Kersey, after getting training from the Pierce-Arrow Company in auto repair, became Worthington's chauffeur. When Worthington moved to California, his successor gave Kersey a letter of introduction to Julius Rosenwald.

Years later, in a memoir, Kersey recalled his first meeting with Rosenwald. "I stepped into a very plainly furnished office," he wrote. "At the desk sat a very stern-looking gentleman with black hair and a mustache and wearing glasses." Rosenwald said that the letter was too long to read. He was a busy man, he told Kersey, and required "the services of a willing worker and one who would not get angry and quit on account of hard work." Kersey got -- and kept -- the job.

Rosenwald, he discovered, was always in a hurry. He would bound down the stairway from his office at Sears, Roebuck, run to the car and tell Kersey his destination while the chauffeur was still holding the door open; he would jump out before the car fully stopped. He often went from one office building to another, with Kersey following him on foot to ascertain where to move the car. "With all of Mr. Rosenwald's dashing here and there," Kersey noted, "shouting at me, short answers to anything I would ask him, he had a kind expression in his eyes and I really learned to like the man."



Harry Kersey and his dog by Julius Rosenwald's car.  
Courtesy of Lee Cromer

Kersey also commented on Rosenwald's dislike of waste. When Rosenwald asked him to buy some razor blades, Kersey bought an entire box. Not pleased, Rosenwald said that he would use them up too quickly and waste them or lose track of them. And he added, "Suppose the price would go down." The chauffeur had to take the box back and return with three packages.

Shortly before Rosenwald died, on January 6, 1932, Kersey got permission to see him. "He was in a coma," he wrote in his memoir. "I took his hand and rubbed it, calling his name; he made no move but was breathing hard. I stood there and watched my friend and employer slowly passing away."

Of the man he had seen almost daily since 1914, Kersey, a Black man who remembered driving Booker T. Washington and Rosenwald, wrote, "If ever there was a person who did not suffer from racial prejudices he was that person."

*It is a crime to pile up money after one has accumulated all that he needs for himself and his family. There is a stage where acquisition becomes a vice.*

Julius Rosenwald, 1918

Stephanie Deutsch, editor

**DONATE**

**We need your support to continue.**

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