

*Your comments were successfully submitted at
July 29, 2022 02:23 PM Mountain Time*

Park: Denver Service Center
Project: Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Special Resource Study
Document: Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Special Resource Study Newsletter

Name: Gavin Baker
Address: 1615 New Hampshire Ave. NW
1st Floor
City: Washington
State: DC
Postal Code: 20009
Email Address: gbaker@alawash.org
Organization: American Library Association
Keep My Info Private: No

Comments: Topic Question 1: The American Library Association (ALA) supports the creation of Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park incorporating some or all of the sites listed above and/or other sites. Rosenwald's life and legacy, including his contributions to American libraries and librarianship, are of national historic significance. A Rosenwald National Historical Park would be an important addition to the National Park System and would fill gaps in the system.

ALA is a supporting organization of the Campaign to Establish the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. In addition to other reasons identified by the Campaign in support of creating a Rosenwald National Historical Park, we wish to highlight one significant aspect of Rosenwald's legacy: his impact on the advancement of American libraries and librarianship. In particular, to our knowledge, no current unit of the National Park System focuses on American libraries or librarians.

While Rosenwald was not a librarian, he was one of the nation's most significant benefactors of libraries and librarianship, particularly for Black Americans. The Rosenwald Fund operated a library program that "established more than 10,000 school, college, and public libraries" and "funded library science programs that trained African American librarians," according to "The African American Struggle for Library Equality: The Untold Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund Library Program," by Aisha M. Johnson-Jones (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

As Congressman Rob Wittman observed in his comments on the House floor in support of the Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools Act of 2020, "Of all of his philanthropic efforts, Rosenwald was most famous for the more than 5,000 Rosenwald Schools he established throughout the South for poor, rural African-American youth, and the 4,000 libraries he added to existing schools." (166 Cong. Rec. H7247, 2020)

Rosenwald's funding supported library facilities, collections, staffing, and professional training. This funding was closely related to the Rosenwald School program, as the Rosenwald Fund recognized a need to expand access to books and librarians both in and out of school, especially for Black Americans.

Rosenwald's support for libraries is an important part of his legacy that should be recognized as part of a new National Historical Park.

Comments: Topic Question 2: As noted above, Rosenwald supported thousands of school, college, and public libraries. While this study is already considering several school sites, the study should also consider public and college libraries supported by Rosenwald as potential sites for inclusion in a Rosenwald National Historical Park. For instance, the Rosenwald Fund supported at least 15 public libraries (including 11 county libraries and 4 city libraries); libraries at 43 Black colleges and normal schools (in particular, to support the training of Black teachers, e.g. to teach in the Rosenwald Schools); and the first schools to train Black library professionals, at the Hampton Institute and Atlanta University. This represented a noteworthy expansion of access for Black Americans to library services and the library profession.

Of those libraries supported by Rosenwald, at least the following buildings appear to remain extant and could be considered as sites for a potential Rosenwald National Historical Park:

The George C. Hall Branch library in Chicago, IL, which continues to operate as a branch of the Chicago Public Library. Rosenwald donated the land for the branch. In addition, the Rosenwald Fund supported the collection for the new branch, and a fellowship for the first branch manager, Vivian G. Harsh. When the library opened in 1932, Hall was the first Chicago Public Library branch with a Black manager. In 2000, ALA's United for Libraries named the Hall Branch a Literary Landmark in recognition of its promotion of Black literary culture by serving as a meeting place for such writers as Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright, arising from a program that Harsh had established. Address: 4801 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60615.

The Myrtle Hall Library for Negroes in Clarksdale, MS (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2018). Address: 1109 N State St., Clarksdale, MS 38614.

The Davis Avenue Branch library in Mobile, AL (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983). Address: 564 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Ave., Mobile, AL 36603.

The Rosa D. Bowser Library in Richmond, VA. Address: 00 Clay St, Richmond, VA 23219.

The 135th Street Branch library in New York, NY. Address: 103-105 W. 135th St., New York, NY 10030.

Comments: Topic Question 3: We recommend that a Rosenwald National Historical Park include interpretive materials that highlight Rosenwald's contributions to library history.

A Rosenwald School site could include a display highlighting the libraries of the Rosenwald Schools. The building plans for Rosenwald Schools included areas for libraries: the building plans could be displayed with annotations in the site. Additionally, the Rosenwald Fund provided support to establish school library collections, and created a recommended list of books for those libraries: the school library collection could be re-created in an interpretive exhibit within the site.

In addition, several libraries supported by Rosenwald used the funding to purchase "book trucks," which served as early bookmobiles, in particular to extend library access to rural areas including schools. Interpretative materials could include photos of those book trucks or a re-creation of a truck.

Comments: Comments: The American Library Association ("ALA") is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all.

Comment ID: 2229010-121834/1816