

The Rosenwald School Building Program assisted African American communities in Tennessee in building 354 schools between 1914 and 1932. From 1920-1932, the program was administered from offices in Nashville. The Rosenwald Fund typically provided the seed money and architectural plans for the schools. Most of the money for the schools came from local sources.

This driving tour features some of the African American schools of West Tennessee that remain on the landscape. While it does not list all the schools in the region, it does highlight compelling stories and places that are either open to the public or visible from the highway. For buildings not open to the public, please respect property rights and view the sites from the sidewalk or roadside.

Webb School

JL Seets Dr., McKenzie

The McKenzie School began in 1923, serving 22 communities as the Carroll County Training School. As interest in the school's training programs increased, more and more students enrolled. John L. Webb provided the funds needed for expansion, and the name was changed to the Webb School.

In 1936, a fire destroyed a number of the school's buildings. In need of a replacement campus, the



board purchased the abandoned McTyeire College campus. New buildings came in the 1950s. In 1965, Webb High School, the only black high school in Carroll County, merged with the formerly all-white McKenzie High School.

Bruce High School
Bruce Ave., Dyersburg



Bruce High School has shaped African American youth in Dyersburg for more than 100 years. As a safe haven for education and community events established c. 1900, the school had extraordinary influence on the African American community until the end of segregation in Dyer County led to the school's closing in 1966.

Only portions of the 1951 building remain. One of the classrooms has been converted into a heritage room about the school and African American life in Dyersburg. Music is a major legacy of the high school, as the marching band was legendary in its time.

The school's showpiece is its historic gym, which still provides the community with a gathering place today.



Historic African American Schools

of West Tennessee:

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A Driving Tour



Mt. Zion School

Mt. Zion Rd., Bradford

The Mt. Zion School served as both a school and community center for African Americans in rural Gibson County until 1962. The frame building stands at the same location as some of the Bradford area's earliest black schools. Local landowners transferred the property to their slaves in the late 1850s to erect a building that could be used as a church and school. That building has long been lost to time, but the current school dates to at least 1915, and the use of hand-hewn logs in the foundation suggests that the community used parts of the earlier school when they constructed this school.

school, which was significantly expanded during the New Deal to a modern high school facility. In 1951, the school was named Carver High School to honor the notable African American agricultural scientist George Washington Carver.



Carver High School served not only Haywood County students but also those from neighboring counties. Its enrollment peaked at 1600 during the 1950s. It was during this period that Tina Turner attended the school. It remained a segregated school until 1970.

Allen-White School

Allen St., Whiteville

After Mr. Jessie C. Allen, a local African American teacher, founded the school in 1905 as the Hardeman County Training School, classes were held for fifteen years in one room of an old Masonic lodge, with an average of 175 students. Outgrowing the building, the African American community raised \$9,000 for the construction of a new facility between 1918 and 1920, the largest sum raised for a Rosenwald-funded school in the state of Tennessee.



James Herbert White was appointed principal in 1928, and under his 20-year term the school was accredited and its debts paid off. The Allen-White School closed in 1970 when the schools of Whiteville integrated.

Polk-Clark High School

1041 S. Harris St., Milan

Polk-Clark High School was initially supported by the Julius Rosenwald Fund to be a high school for African American students in Gibson County. Polk-Clark continued to expand from its roots as a Rosenwald school, adding rooms and classroom wings into the 1960s. The last high school class graduated in 1970. With school integration, Polk-Clark served the entire community for more than 20 years until it was closed in 1996.

Today, the Polk-Clark High School Alumni Association preserves the school, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It operates a two-room heritage center that tells the school's history in academics, sports, and music. The building is used for many community functions and hosts adult-education programs.



Trenton Rosenwald School

421 E. 2nd St., Trenton

Trenton's first Rosenwald school was built in 1928 at this location. The present building dates to 1953, when the original Rosenwald school was lost to fire. In its place, local school board officials built a modern, standardized, comprehensive school for grades 1-12. The new building and its facilities were part of an effort by local white leaders to upgrade black public schools in order to delay integration.



The last high school class graduated in 1968. The building then served as a middle school until 1996. It now includes a Head Start program, and the old gymnasium and cafeteria host many recreational and community events.

Carver High School

709 Jefferson St., Brownsville

Education for African Americans began in Brownsville in 1866. The present high school building developed from a 1922 Rosenwald

The Dunbar-Carver Museum preserves not only the remaining school buildings but also interprets the impact of education on African American life and culture in Haywood County.

West Bemis School

324 2nd St., Jackson

Currently undergoing restoration, the Bemis Rosenwald School is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Bemis Historic District. This one-story frame school may be the oldest extant school built with Rosenwald funds in Tennessee. It dates to 1916, a time when officials at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama remained as administrators of the school-building program.

Bemis was an early 20th-century planned cotton mill town just south of downtown Jackson. African Americans lived in a segregated portion of the village. The school served this community until integration took place in Jackson during the 1960s.

