

Update: Given the current community spread of COVID-19,
this exhibit will now **open on Saturday, Feb. 5, 2022.**

A free community day to celebrate the opening is planned for Saturday, Feb. 26,
as part of the museum's annual African American Heritage Festival.

**NEW PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT EXPLORES 20TH CENTURY EFFORT TO
PROVIDE QUALITY SCHOOLS FOR BLACK CHILDREN DESPITE SEGREGATION**

***“A Better Life for Their Children” premiered at the National Center for Civil
and Human Rights in Atlanta in May***

CHARLOTTE, N.C., Dec. 14, 2021 – On January 13, The Charlotte Museum of History will host a new exhibit that highlights a Jim Crow-era partnership between a Black educator and a Jewish businessman that changed the lives of Black children and families in the American South for generations. The exhibit premiered at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta in May.

“ ‘A Better Life for Their Children’ offers us the opportunity to explore the history of education in Charlotte and across the South,” said Fannie Flono, history museum trustee and chair of the museum’s Save Siloam School Project. “This history has never been more relevant, as our city and county work to improve equality and opportunity. The Rosenwald Schools story can help us understand how we got here and how we move forward.”

The exhibit tells the story of one of the most significant moments in the history of education in the rural South—the ambitious Rosenwald Schools program, launched by educator Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Company. Of the original 4,978 schools built for Black children with the support of the Rosenwald Fund, only about 500 survive. Many of those are threatened by decay and neglect. A photographer and fifth-generation Jewish Georgian, Andrew Feiler, drove more than 25,000 miles across the South to document this important history. Along the way, he interviewed former Rosenwald School students and teachers, as well as preservationists and community leaders. That work became “A Better Life for Their Children,” a book of photographs, stories and essays published in early 2021, and this accompanying exhibit.



“We often see America’s challenges as intractable, especially those related to race,” Feiler said. “Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald reached across divides of race, religion and region, and they changed this nation. Their accomplishment still speaks to us today, showing that individual actions matter.”

Communities in North Carolina built 813 Rosenwald schools, more than any other state. More than 20 Rosenwald Schools were built in Mecklenburg County, but only seven of the buildings still stand.

The history museum is displaying the exhibit as part of its years-long effort to restore Charlotte’s historic Siloam School, a Rosenwald-era school built by an African American community in the 1920s. While the school’s design used a Rosenwald plan, there are no records indicating that the school received Rosenwald funds. It is likely that the local Black farming community in the Mallard Creek area raised money for the school and donated time and labor to build it. Once restored, the building will become an important history resource for Charlotte, shining light on current issues around equity, education and opportunity. So far, the Save Siloam School Project has raised \$660,000 toward a \$1 million goal to complete the school’s restoration.

High resolution photographs from the exhibit and accompanying book are available for media usage, with proper credit, at <https://bit.ly/3kld11N>.

The exhibit’s run at the history museum is supported by grants from AT&T Foundation, PRIDE Magazine and North Carolina Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

About Rosenwald Schools

In the early decades of the twentieth century, a visionary partnership between a Black educator and a Jewish business leader launched transformational change across the segregated South.



Born to Jewish immigrants, Julius Rosenwald rose to lead Sears, Roebuck & Company and turned it into the world's largest retailer. Born into slavery, Booker T. Washington became the founder and first president of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University). In 1912 the two men launched an ambitious program to partner with Black communities to build public schools for African American children. From 1912 to 1937, the program built 4,978 schools across 15 states. Rosenwald schools drove dramatic improvement in Black educational attainment and educated the generation who became leaders and foot soldiers of the Civil Rights movement. Former congressman John Lewis, a Rosenwald School alumnus, wrote the foreword for Feiler's book.

About Andrew Feiler

Andrew Feiler is a photographer and author from Savannah, Ga. He has long been active in civic life, supporting creative community initiatives and serving on nonprofit boards. His art is an extension of his civic values. Feiler's work has been featured in the "Wall Street Journal" and "Smithsonian" and on "CBS This Morning." See more of Feiler's work at andrewfeiler.com.

How to Go

The exhibit—"A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T. Washington, and the 4,978 Schools that Changed America. Photographs & Stories by Andrew Feiler"—will be on display at The Charlotte Museum of History through June 18, 2022.

The exhibit is included in regular museum admission. Get tickets at charlottemuseum.org/visit.

About The Charlotte Museum of History

The Charlotte Museum of History exists to save and share the Charlotte region's history, helping create a better understanding of the past and inspiring dialogue about the future. The museum is the steward of the 1774 Hezekiah Alexander Rock House and homesite, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the oldest home in Mecklenburg County. Visit charlottemuseum.org and follow the museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#). The museum is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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