

NEWS LETTER TO RURAL SCHOOL EXPLORERS

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Julius Rosenwald Fund

Chicago



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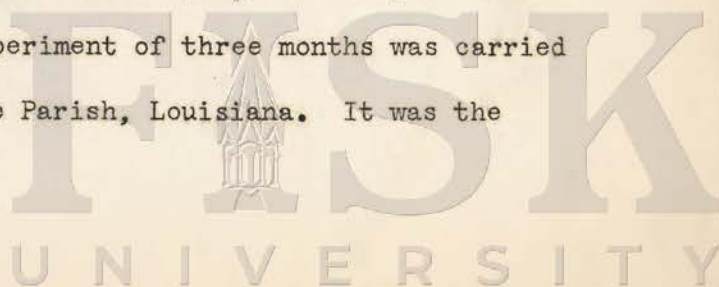
We have thought that it might be of interest and help to all of us - councilors, explorers, officers of the Julius Rosnewald Fund, and perhaps to other educators and laymen - if we issued an occasional news bulletin of this new venture of exploration into rural education. As we go along through the year we hope to put into words in this bulletin a growing and clarified philosophy of what we are hoping to accomplish.

In this first paper we are giving a short re-statement of our aims and objectives, and excerpts from letters from the explorers as they are starting to get settled in their new and greatly varying stations.

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In May, 1934, the trustees of the Julius Rosenwald Fund decided to undertake a program of study of rural schools and rural life. This decision was the result of a sharp realization that the traditional activity of the Fund - that of assisting in the building of rural schools for Negroes - was not enough. Obviously, one of the essentials of adequate education is the schoolhouse. The physical housing of education, however, is only the barest of beginnings. Far more important, and infinitely more difficult of accomplishment, is effective and proper use of this schoolhouse. That is to say, however important and desirable the outside of a school may be, the inside - the teachers, the children, and the materials of instruction - are in the last analysis the elements which make education.

Before the Board was presented with this program of exploration into the rural situation, an initial experiment of three months was carried on at Foreman School in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. It was the





purpose of this experiment to find out if, after all, anything could be done to improve conditions in rural schools. On the basis of this work (which proved that good could be done but that it would take much more than one effort either to accomplish anything or to arrive at any conclusions which would really strike the heart of the difficulty) it was decided to carry on a number of similar experiments. While the major emphasis will be placed on Negro schools, since that is the traditional field of the Fund, the problems of white rural education are also to be studied in order to give us a complete picture.

Rural education, the country over, is in pitiable shape. On the basis of the three months' experience at Foreman School and from the general knowledge of the officers of the Fund several things are clear:

1. Negro rural schools are desperately poor in the matter of elementary equipment, including books and charts; the buildings are often in disrepair; the teachers are poorly paid and usually ill-equipped for their tasks; the curriculum is formalized and dull.
2. The colored group is not accustomed to community effort and is lacking in leadership or experience in improving its own public services.
3. The white community is not so much hostile as indifferent and crassly neglectful of the needs of the Negro group in such progressive matters as schools and health services.
4. The authorities in the persons of state and county officials often share the indifference of the white community. The Negro supervisors - county Jeanes supervisors, farm and home demonstration agents, etc. - are busy with a multitude of details throughout the counties and are apt to be routinized in their tasks. Many of them are intimidated by the white officials to such a degree that they do not even call attention to glaring lacks in the schools and other public services.
5. There is, however, real interest in the school on the part of the Negro group and some latent leadership which can be made effective if aroused and encouraged. There is usually no

hostility on the part of the white group or the white officials; school needs may be supplied if demanded tactfully but firmly; often there are white individuals ready to champion the Negro cause if the matter is called to public attention.

It is easy to see these conditions; it is not nearly so easy to conceive of ways and means of remedying the situation. We must have much more thorough study, not only in an attempt to alleviate the more obvious ills but also - and this we admit is a tremendous, possibly an impossible task - to revive the school as a really educational institution, and through education to enrich rural life.

It is a presumptuous attempt. But if we cannot vivify and enrich education itself, then there is no use going on busying ourselves with school buildings and free text books and new equipment, with administrative organization and teacher-training.

As we talked over the matter in the Julius Rosenwald Fund and among individuals about the country, we felt that several items were lacking in present attacks on education.

1. The people who are setting the school programs, determining curricula, preparing text books, training and selecting teachers - these officials and authorities are not closely enough or freshly enough in touch with the actual problems of the little rural school.

2. The educational field has got itself divided into compartments or segments. There are specialists on history and reading and science and arithmetic; experts on buildings, doctors of philosophy in school administration; farm agents, domestic science supervisors, special teachers of music or basket weaving, separate individuals charged with health or psychology. All these specialists are helpful - probably necessary - in developing these important subjects. But between them they seem to have lost sight of the poor little school child who after all is a unit being.

3. The whole trend of our school system is to urbanize the pupils; the entire pull of modern education is away from the farms toward a white collar, city or small town, bourgeoisie.



4. In building our educational ladder we have not unnaturally emphasized the higher altitudes. We tend too much to think of each rung in this ladder, not as an end in itself but as a means of preparing for the next higher rung. We forget so easily that even in America most pupils do not get beyond elementary school. The great mass of rural Negro children complete their total schooling at the third grade.

5. Individuals who are trying to improve the schools are either working on such fragmentary items or are themselves so unrelated to the rather crude powers which are ruling our school procedures that even brilliant efforts have failed of fulfillment.

With these ills in mind, the Julius Rosenwald Fund is trying to set up an organization that will circumvent the existing lacks and may provide a new means of successful effort.

We expect first, through the explorers, to get a freshly intimate picture of just what the rural scene is today, especially in the American South, and of what place in that scene the school is filling or failing to fill.

We are determined to view the school as a whole, giving careful attention to detailed subjects, but regarding these as they bear upon and have their place in the total education of the child.

We propose to view the rural school as a preparation not for city life but for a rich and satisfying life in the country.

We shall concentrate our attention on the elementary school and on the early grades of the elementary school. If we can plan a truly educational life for three to five grades we will affect fundamentally the development of all the children of the nation.

As a mechanism by which we hope to accomplish these objectives, we have set up a Council on Rural Education, composed of two groups - the councilors and the explorers. Nominally, the councilors' duties are to appear at three conferences during the year and add wisdom to the discus-

sions; the explorers are to work in the field, studying the conditions of rural life and the rural school, with a view to making recommendations as the year goes on. Actually, we expect the explorers to add considerable wisdom to the group, and the councilors to spend as much time as possible in the field.

We have chosen our councilors and our explorers with the greatest care, selecting a small group who seem best fitted to form a continuing body to take responsibility for planning and guiding the work. The list of the councilors and explorers follows:



Councilors

Dr. W. W. Alexander, Director, Commission on Interracial Cooperation,  
Atlanta, Georgia

Mrs. Jessie H. Benjamin, Jeanes supervisor and instructor in rural  
education, Forsyth Normal School, Georgia.

Dr. John J. Coss, Columbia University, New York City.

Mr. J. C. Dixon, Georgia State Department of Education,  
State Agent for Negro Schools, Atlanta.

Mr. Leo M. Favrot, Southern representative of the General Education  
Board, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Mr. Burton Fowler, Tower Hill School, Wilmington, Delaware; president,  
Progressive Education Association.

Mr. Nolen M. Irby, Arkansas State Department of Education, State  
Agent for Negro Schools, Little Rock.

Dr. Charles S. Johnson, Director, Department of Social Science, Fisk  
University, Nashville, Tennessee; author, The Negro in American  
Civilization, Shadow of the Plantation, etc.

Dr. Charles H. Judd, Director, Department of Education, University  
of Chicago.

Mr. A. C. Lewis, Louisiana State Department of Education, State  
Agent for Negro Schools, Baton Rouge.

Mr. Fred McCuistion, Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools  
of the Southern States, Nashville, Tennessee.

Dr. B. Schrieke, Director of Education of the Dutch East Indies,  
Batavia, Java.

Mr. Lloyd Warner, Division of Anthropology, Harvard University, Cam-  
bridge, Massachusetts.

Mr. Arthur D. Wright, President, Anna T. Jeanes Fund and John F.  
Slater Fund, Washington, D. C.

Mr. Edwin R. Embree, President, Julius Rosenwald Fund, Chicago.

Mr. and Mrs. James F. Simon, Julius Rosenwald Fund, Chicago.



Explorers

- Miss Florence R. Beatty, graduate (1933) of Fisk University;  
teacher in public schools of Cairo, Illinois.
- Mr. Horace Mann Bond, dean-elect of the undergraduate college of  
Dillard University, New Orleans; author of Education of the  
Negro.
- Mrs. Horace Mann Bond, graduate of Fisk University.
- Mrs. Elizabeth Perry Cannon, instructor at Spelman College;  
made demonstration of conducting a one-teacher school as a  
part of Spelman summer normal course.
- Mrs. Catherine J. Duncan, Jeanes supervisor in Georgia.
- Mr. Buford H. Junker, graduate student in anthropology at  
Harvard University.
- Miss Ruth Lockman, graduate of Emory University, Atlanta;  
teacher in public schools of Georgia.
- Mrs. Estelle Massey Riddle, graduate nurse, formerly on staff  
of Freedmen's Hospital, Washington, D.C.; President,  
National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses.
- Mr. E. C. Morgenroth, teacher in public schools of Wisconsin.
- Mrs. E. C. Morgenroth, teacher in experimental school in  
Ravinia, Illinois.
- Miss Narvie Purifoy, graduate (1934) of Livingstone College,  
North Carolina; teacher in one-room rural school at  
the age of sixteen.
- Mr. John E. Wilson, graduate (1934) of Emory University,  
Atlanta, Georgia.





Excerpts from Letters

From Narvie Purifoy, near Pine Bluff, Arkansas

"Just to give you an insight into the character of our plantation boss, I will say that he heard that I had been inquiring about sugar cane, so he came by Tuesday evening and brought two stalks from a nearby farm and stayed and talked with me for almost two hours. He is a very good-natured man. A bit shy and always tired, for he works as hard as any of the tenants. You see, then, that our biggest fear has been dissolved.

"We are trying to get up a community fair in connection with school opening day. Will tell you how it comes out. People are 'thawing' out right along in receiving us. Rather hard to find them except on Sundays. Cotton is still king."

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From Buford H. Junker, Perry, Georgia

"Mr. Dixon and I came here Monday, October 15th, and began meeting people the next day. The County Superintendent had been ill a few days and was in a Macon hospital. After Mr. Dixon's departure I waited a few days before approaching our project here: Mt. Nebo School near Houston Lake and King's Chapel about two miles from there - both of which are within a radius of four miles from Perry, the county seat. In the meantime I was 'contacting' all the white folks of any influence here, and talking, when possible, to the colored help about the hotel as well as buying a car and finding a home in which to lodge and board. Mr. Houser, the Superintendent died suddenly Friday, October 19th. On the following Monday, Mr. Dixon and Mr. Cousins came to Perry with Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wright for a conference of Jeanes teachers in Fort Valley, Peach County. There I also saw Mrs. Benjamin, whose

project is in Forsyth, not far from here, and we arranged to exchange visits. By Wednesday my car was available and I drove out to the schools with Mr. Gooden, City Superintendent, as my sponsor to the teachers. On succeeding visits, alone, I have been getting acquainted, taking pictures (of the buildings and of children, posed and at play), meeting trustees - in short, establishing human relations. At this season the colored folks here go in for raising money by giving entertainments, raffles, etc., and the schools are no exceptions - so I hope to meet parents at one of these affairs. White folks, particularly those in educational and relief work, are making certain efforts to help the Negro schools, and the County Relief Administrator already has under way a plan for collecting used books from white school children and she has welcomed me as her distributor of this collection to the rural schools, particularly to my project. (In the 'urban' area of Perry, cooks and other colored help often beg books from their employers to be used by their children. The present project is simply an extension of this to benefit the rural school children.) In the meantime, as indicated above, I am participating in the white community (going to Sunday school, church, one denomination at a time, playing bridge, going to fairs, etc.) to ensure a fairly solid position there before intensifying my efforts among the colored folks. The distribution of used books will serve to provide the former with a suitable notion of my activities - they are pleased to think such behaviour honorable, and most recent in their minds is the passing of Mr. Houser, whose 'acts of generosity' toward the colored schools endeared him in the memories of his friends, white and colored alike. After only four days' contact with the colored folks about my project I can't, of course, have much to summarize, but later I hope to make a more adequate contribution to your news letter."



From Estelle Massey Riddle, Calhoun, Louisiana

"Excluding car trouble, I have had smooth sailing since being here. Mineral Springs is a rather progressive community, although it is almost over-organized in the light of population numbers and resources. The opportunity here lies, not so much in organizing the community, as in directing and avoiding duplication of the activities of the existing organizations. The week I came (October 8) the air was full of talk about three new projects: a church building, a teachers' cottage, and a 4-H Camp. As I got better acquainted I learned that there is not sufficient money to carry any one of these projects to completion. The money for all must come from the same people. Although little was said about it, the piano in the school is to be paid for and the school building needs repairing.

"Inasmuch as the work on the church has already begun (just yesterday I learned they have run into a financial snag and work has ceased temporarily - across the road is an unfinished Masonic Hall) I am trying to discourage the idea of starting the teachers' cottage just now, and am trying to concentrate efforts toward paying for the piano. We have planned a series of social affairs, the first of which will be a Halloween Party on Wednesday night.

"Although I doubt if the 4-H Club will materialize during this school year, I am trying to pick some of the young people who might make good directors for camp activities to give them some training for such work. Otherwise they will have a camp and no one to conduct it.

"The teachers have been exceedingly friendly and cooperative.

"The Jeanes supervisor is a fine, intelligent woman who seems anxious to push any idea for advancing the schools in this parish. Over the colored schools she has the power of a parish superintendent. Last week I explained

to her why I felt there should be four teachers at Mineral Springs instead of three and complained of the worn out black-boards. Today the fourth teacher began work and she promised to get the black-boards soon.

"The P.T.A. met last week, elected officers and made plans for the year. I agreed to give them the course in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick, also the Red Cross course in First Aid. People of this calibre usually like these courses as they can be made quite practical. From all indications, they did good work last year. They canned everything from okra to cows.

"At school I have what I call a 'Variety Hour' with several groups of the children. We meet in the domestic science hall, apart from the main building, so that we may resort to most any type of activity. We are now reading and discussing simple poetry and stories. In this way I get in some drill on phonetics. So far I have managed to get them to smile and relax a bit. There is so little material here to use for this purpose and I seem not to have the ability to make them burst into original verse or song spontaneously. Good English is like a foreign language to some of these youngsters.

"While assuring me of his willingness to cooperate with me, the parish superintendent of schools told me that sentiment in this section was such that white schools must be built ere they build for the colored. When asked if he could note any change in sentiment in favor of better schools for Negroes, he replied, 'Oh, yes, it is changing but there is no money now.'

"I have done little toward getting acquainted with the health officials, but plan to do so after my return from the East."





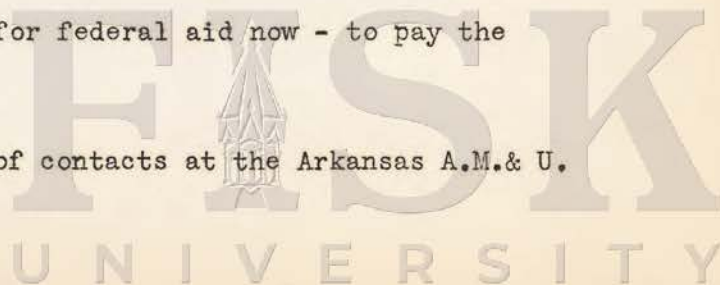
From Edwin Morgenroth, Hermitage, Arkansas

"We are settled in the home of the President of the Local Board - one of the three houses in the village with electricity and running water. The son of this family teaches in the local school. We are being introduced to the white community in a most encouraging way. Have already attended an entertainment ('Aunt Jerushy on the War Path') and four hours of Baptist church yesterday - one sermon for our benefit on 'What We Believe.'

"The situation demands that we do some work in the white school. They are in need of so many things and have asked for us to help them. PTA is organizing as a result. Community has been working on a gymnasium. We are to go to teachers' meeting at school today. They have offered us a vacant room as a work room - art, etc., will flourish there. Incidentally, I am sure that if you send us a library for the colored school it is essential that we have one for the white school too. The President of the Board is a most sympathetic and intelligent man and I have had several 'heart to heart' talks with him.

"We have our first big meeting at the colored school tonight. Incidentally there is no colored school building here and no one knows when the colored school will open - 'perhaps the 19th of November.' The Board President feels that we can get donations of logs and lumber, etc., and the colored group is willing to do the labor to build a school. They have recently bought a lot by giving 'conserks.' There is to be another program on 'Armistick' day. More details on this building later. When the school does open, it will be held in one of the churches - with not even a blackboard, chalk, books - nothing. They are waiting for federal aid now - to pay the teacher.

"We have made a splendid number of contacts at the Arkansas A.M. & U.



College in Pine Bluff, I have induced the President to send a program of singers, etc., to Hermitage on a benefit for the school building. Also a splendid contact at Hendrix College - a fine little Methodist school (white) in Conway, Arkansas.

"Our big difficulty here is that we will be too busy 'doing' things - people have more or less accepted us (because of our excellent introduction through this family) and they are beginning to call on us to help. We shall keep in mind the need for observing in spite of our apparent plunge into things here. At a county-wide meeting Saturday an all colored Board asked us to come over and work with them - at Mt. Olive, 8 miles from here. I intend to go over there soon - it is quite another type of arrangement than locally."

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From Mollie Morgenroth, Hermitage, Arkansas

"The school situation (white) is worse than many of the colored schools we have seen - 68 squirming bits of humanity in the first grade - with a sweet little teacher about 4 feet high - kids sitting two in a seat - same hours for the six-year-olds as for high school seniors. No rest all day for the teachers. First grade room about the size of your office with half that much window space. To tell you that in the high school building next door there are two huge well ventilated rooms standing unused (and locked up) will give you some idea of how little these people have learned about doing with what they have the most that can be done.

"The first grade teacher and I had a visit yesterday after church. She asked me to come up and visit her (I had waited to be asked). She said she had always been interested in music and art but just 'never could get to it' - and I'm sure she couldn't."

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From John E. Wilson, attached to white school  
in Rutledge, Georgia

"We really are on location, and while reports will come around soon enough, I cannot refrain from giving you some idea as to our situation. We are some 50 miles from Atlanta in an excellent farming section. Most of the school children here are from poor families, and most of them tenant farmers. It seems that at one time there was a great deal of interest in the school and in education, and while it has by no means disappeared, a situation has developed that has destroyed most of it for many of the poorer families. It waits to be aroused again and perhaps - I was about to get away from myself. December will be time enough for that. The building is in a 'run-down' condition - in short, I feel already that it is typical and affords great opportunity for study.

"The lady of the house asked us all together - Mr. Dixon, Mr. Alexander, who came down with us, and Miss Lockman and I - if we were city 'folks.' I think she is convinced now that I can never hope to be anything but a countryman. From indications now, and always with the provision that we aren't foolish and tactless to the extreme, I don't think we will get run out.

"These people here are already planning fox hunts for us. I've already eaten more chicken than I think I ever saw before. It will not be long before they will be killing hogs. I don't know whether that means much to you or not.



Books and Pamphlets

An explorer cannot be expected to be familiar with the multitude of problems arising from ignorance or bad practice in the efforts of a people to make a living. But he can and should know what is necessary to better those conditions or at least know where he can obtain information that will be of benefit.

A small section of the news letter will, from time to time, be devoted to bibliography of source material pertinent to the needs of rural people. Much of this information may be available through county agents and universities located in the area in which you work. However, a general knowledge of fundamentals will be of inestimable benefit to each worker in his efforts to get on with the people and will in many instances expedite the solution of the problem by eliminating the necessity of locating an already over-worked county agent.

All bulletins mentioned are written in a language that any intelligent individual can understand, whether he is familiar with dirt farming or not.

A bibliography of bulletins and documents useful to explorers is:

AGRICULTURE:

The Farm Garden. Farmers Bul. No. 1673, Gov't Printing Office, 10¢.

A treatise on all farm vegetables, including culture and cultivation for each crop.

Diseases and Insects of Garden Vegetables. Farmers Bul. No. 1371, Govt. Printing Office, 5¢.

A bulletin covering the ecology of important pests and their control, giving specific control measures for each one.

The Preservative Treatment of Farm Timbers. Farmers Bul. No. 744, 5¢.

Discusses briefly kinds of decay and methods of treatment.



Protection of Log Cabins, Rustic Work, and Unseasoned Wood from Injurious Insects. Farmers Bul. No. 1582, 5¢.

This bulletin, with No. 744, will give you a working knowledge of all the most important wood preserving medicines and their application.

Growing Fruit for Home Use. Farmers Bul. No. 1001, Gov't Printing Office, 5¢.

An important bulletin covering the chief varieties of all fruits and a survey of the various regions in which they thrive.