

Sears president's school program inspired by Booker T. Washington

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A program that led to the building of more than 5,000 schools throughout the South for African-American children grew out of a meeting in May 1911 between black educator Booker T. Washington and the president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., Julius Rosenwald.

According to historical accounts, the two men found they shared many beliefs, among them the need for institutions to help people raise themselves from poverty. Washington persuaded Rosenwald to revive a defunct program that had started in 1904 in which Standard Oil provided funds to build 46 schools in rural Alabama.

Rosenwald financed six more schools in Alabama, then donated \$25,000 more to help mark his



Who was Julius Rosenwald?

The president of Sears, Roebuck and Co. donated money to build schools for African-American students in the early 20th century. He eventually set up a fund that helped build 5,357 schools across the South, as well as workshops and homes for teachers.

50th birthday. He added a stipulation: His money must be used as matching grants for the building of additional African-American schools.

When Washington died in 1915, their collaboration had produced 300 schools in Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia.

By then, though, Rosenwald was rolling. He eventually set up the Julius Rosenwald Fund in Chicago, which ultimately helped fund 5,357 new schools in 883 counties across 15 southern states. The fund also helped con-

struct workshops and homes for teachers.

Total cost of the project came to more than \$28 million, including more than \$18 million in public funds, nearly \$5 million from African Americans and \$1.2 million from whites.

By the end of the building program, 79 of Virginia's 95 counties had at least one Rosenwald school.

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