



Plaisance School Early Building



Plaisance School



Plaisance High School

Rosenwald School

The Plaisance School is a one story frame building. It was constructed in 1920 under the Rosenwald Rural School Building Program. Like most Rosenwald schools across the South, it is a utilitarian "no style" building. (Rosenwald schools were built to a variety of standardized plans). Located in the rural community of the same name, the school has remained in continuous educational use since its construction over 80 years ago. It is now on the edge of a circa 1960 campus of one story brick veneer buildings. Because the school has been in constant use, there have been various alterations, some notable. But despite these alterations, the school retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance in the history of black education. Its importance is underscored by the extremely low survival rate of Rosenwald schools in Louisiana.

The Rosenwald school has not only survived but has retained its overall form, general appearance and most (if not a majority) of its historic fabric.

Today, there are only two known survivors that retain any integrity, and the Plaisance School is the only one in its original location – in the same community it was built to serve and still in educational use.

The Plaisance School is a state of significance in the areas of education and African-American heritage because it is a very rare survivor to represent the most ambitious school building program in the state for black children in the early twentieth century. Out of the 393 Rosenwald schools built in Louisiana between 1914 and 1932, there are only two known survivors (at least in recognizable form) – the Plaisance school and a school

moved recently to Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

Termed "the largest school building program for African Americans in the South since Reconstruction," the Rosenwald Fund's benefactor was Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. While Rosenwald provided all the important funding, the program was actually the brainchild of famed African-American educator, Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

While the Rosenwald Fund envisioned financial support from local whites, their contribution was small across the board. Of the \$28.4 million total, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$4.3 million, blacks \$4.7 million, local governments \$18.1 million (64%) and whites 4%.

The Plaisance school's survival (quite remarkable given the foregoing statistics) is undoubtedly due to its continued use for education. Rosenwald funds records show that it was built in the 1920-21 school year at a total cost of \$4500, with the fund providing \$1200; blacks raising \$3,100; and school authorities and whites contributing a paltry \$100 each. The foregoing lopsided breakdown graphically illustrates the desire for education at a great sacrifice. Keep in mind that this was a rural population with a middle class. People making contributions would have been sharecroppers and tenant farmers for the most part.

Rosenwald (Plaisance building) remained the only public school for blacks in Plaisance until circa 1960, when the adjacent brick facility was constructed. During most of the historic period (1920-

53) grades 1-6 or 1-7 were taught there. In the late 1940s Plaisance was able to secure high school classes, some of which were apparently taught in the Rosenwald building as well as a couple of satellite building added at that time.

The Plaisance Rosenwald School was placed on National Register of Historic Places on August 23, 2004.

(Information taken from National Register of Historic Places)

Historic Plaisance High

Listing on National Register sought

By Jacqueline Cochran

PLAISANCE — Muriel Thompson fanned the pages of the yearbook as the students moved in for a closer look.

"I wanted to show you that basketball team," she said while unconsciously pushing her hair back against a gust of wind.

"Here we are," Thompson said. "Now that was a day to remember in Alexandria. We won the state championship and everybody was there. I think we closed Plaisance that day."

Former students and teachers of Plaisance High School gathered this week at the community school to learn about a push to have the school built in 1920 placed onto the National Register of Historic Places.

The building is currently being used as a band room and is one of only two existing Rosenwald Schools in the state.

A total of 5,357 Rosenwald Schools were built from 1913 to 1932 throughout 15 states as a means of improving educational opportunities for blacks living in the South.

Louisiana had 435 such schools. The other Rosenwald School is located in Denahsonville and is not in its original state, nor original location, said



Photo by Jacqueline Cochran

Former students and teachers of Plaisance High School join St. Landry Parish gifted program teacher Karen Ryder for a photo in front of the old school building. From left to right are: the Rev. Woodrow Thompson, teacher 1960-69; Muriel Thompson, teacher 1950-80; Herman Bertrand, 1942 graduate; Rufus Charles, 1956 graduate; Mae Resa Charles, 1953 graduate and teacher 1990-89; Northwest High School principal Raynord Casimere, 1969 graduate; Ryder; Jeffery Fontenot, 1966 graduate; and Hazel Red, teacher 1967-present.

National Register meeting
When: 1:30 p.m., Dec. 9
Where: Claiborne Conference Center, 1202 N. 3rd St., Baton Rouge

when I learned the original structure was a Rosenwald School. The project got put aside," she said.

This school year the parish's gifted program is working to document St. Landry Parish's 35 nationally listed historical homes and buildings. It is this project that

find the support," Ryder said.

Julius Rosenwald made his fortune while working for Sears and Roebuck. "He is the man who came up with the idea of a mail order catalog," Ryder said. "He was also good friends with Booker T. Washington."

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation Web site, Rosenwald, himself a high school dropout, became interested in Washington's attempts to improve education for

reached rural areas.

Buildings almost always included meeting space, a key aspect of Washington's vision to make the school a community center. Hanchett said. In small buildings a movable partition allowed classrooms to be joined as an assembly hall. Bigger schools featured a permanent auditorium.

Raymond Casimere, principal of Northwest High School and 1969 graduate of Plaisance High, held a stack of papers showing a break-

down in construction costs for the five Rosenwald Schools built in St. Landry Parish.

Blacks in the Plaisance community raised \$3,100; \$100 came from white families; \$100 from the public school system; and \$1,200 from the Rosenwald program, Casimere said.

"That was a lot of money for these people to put up at that time," Casimere said.

"As a little boy I remember my mama talking

Plaisance School, National Register

PLAISANCE'S ROSENWALD SCHOOL

School's rich history recognized



Photo by Freddie Herpin

Charles Ross, left, St. Landry Parish School Board member, and state Rep. Donald Cravins Jr. unveil the National Register of Historic Places marker Friday at the Rosenwald School in Plaisance.

Marker attests to building's historic value

By Jacqueline Cochran

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PLAISANCE — It was the first time Barry Laday actually got to go into the school he had heard so much about growing up.

"My mother was born here and went to school here," the Oklahoma resident said. "It's kind of nice to know it's the only one in the state."

A historical marker noting the Plaisance School's foothold

in history now stands before the original school building. Built in 1921 as a community school for area black children, it is now recognized as a national treasure.

More than 20 years ago, a first attempt to receive state recognition was made, but at that time, only the property of whites — rich whites — was considered "of historic interest," said Donna Fricker, state coordinator for the Division of Historic Preservation. "It was a very elitist thing," she said.

Last August, a second attempt was rewarded with a listing on the National Register for Historic Places after the state gave its blessings to

"So many sons and daughters from this school have excelled throughout the United States. It has been a true incubator for leadership."

John Joseph

Former Opelousas mayor and Rosenwald student



the school's application.

"Not only is it the only certified Rosenwald School we know of in the state, but it is one of few schools remaining constructed specifically for the purpose of educating blacks," Fricker said.

Julius Rosenwald of Chicago was president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., and a friend of black educator Booker T. Washington. Together, they

developed a plan to make education more accessible for rural blacks by offering to give communities the plans for a school building and \$1,200 to help with the construction cost. The communities had to come up with the rest of the money on their own.

Fricker said most people worked as farmers then.

See School Page 6A

Plaisance High School National Register Marker

Time Line ***Plaisance High School***

- April, 1865 Slaves in Louisiana freed by Emancipation Proclamation
- 1881 Mohorn Baptist Church was established with the stipulation that there would be a school
- 1884 First school established at Mohorn Baptist Church in the Plaisance Community
- 1900 Public elementary schools become available for blacks in rural South
- 1902 Another private school established on Chretien Plantation but lasted only a few years
- School continued at Mohorn Baptist Church
- 1914 Rosenwald School building program began in south
- 1920 The Rosenwald Fund provided money for rural schools in the South. Citizens of Plaisance applied and were funded, but funds had to be matched from members of the community.
- August 4, 1921 Athanus Malveaux sold three acres of land to the St. Landry School Board to build the Plaisance Elementary School.
- Felix Mack appointed the first principal of Plaisance (1920-1940)
- The school would go to the seventh grade
- 1938 Plaisance added the 8th grade
- 1940 Lawrence J. Ballard named second principal (1940-1944)
- 1944 Matthew Millard Guidry named third principal (1944-1962)
- 1947 Plaisance added the eleventh grade, which allowed students to complete high school.
- 1948 First class graduated from Plaisance (11th grade)
- Plaisance girls won state championship in Basketball
- 1951 Plaisance added the 12th grade

- 1952 First class graduated from Plaisance High School, completing twelfth grade
- 1962 School introduced football
Cephus Joubert named fourth principal (1962-1965)
- 1965 Willie Daniels named principal (1965-1985)
- 1968 Students became active in science and social studies fairs.
Students held demonstrations in protest of Dr. Martin Luther King's death.
- 1976 Abner Malveaux, descendant of Athanus Malveaux, sold 18.9 acres of land to expand Plaisance High School
Boys Basketball team wins 1st state championship under the leadership of Coach Murphy Guillory.
- 1985 Elgy Sam named principal
- 1991 School board consolidated and reduced Plaisance to elementary school
- 1991 Last graduating class from Plaisance High School

The birth of a school

Plaisance beginning didn't come easy

By STEVE LERLAND
Staff Writer

Public education, it's something taken for granted today by children and parents alike. But, it wasn't always that way.

Margrette Gauthier of Washington especially appreciates how rare formal education once was: her grandfather, Felix Thierry — himself poorly educated — established the first approved public school for blacks in Plaisance.

Several years later, Mrs. Gauthier was one of the first graduates of the Plaisance school.

Today, at age 79, Mrs. Gauthier beams with pride at the integral role her grandfather played in establishing a school for blacks in Plaisance — at a time when no one else would.

"He (Thierry) was a poor man, but he was considered better off than most people in the Plaisance area," Mrs. Gauthier explained.

"He asked the superintendent of schools at the time if the state would provide a teacher if he (Thierry) built his own school on his own land."

A private school existed in Plaisance at the time, but the cost of attending the facility — 50 cents a month — was prohibitive to some.

"If a person had five children, paying the

"He asked the superintendent of schools at the time if the state would provide a teacher if he (Thierry) built his own school on his own land."

fee, paying for the books, walking to school and eating a cold lunch, it was more than a person could afford."

In that light, Thierry's effort to build a public school was particularly timely.

"My mother answered the door when the superintendent brought the message back from Baton Rouge. The school was approved, but they had to see the location of the land. The school had to be bordered by a public road."

Property Thierry owned wasn't suitable for that purpose, so the facility was constructed on property, owned by Ezevout Cretien, not far from the present Plaisance High School site.

While Thierry furnished construction materials, building the 30 foot by 24 foot school home was a community wide effort, Mrs. Gauthier said.

"Everybody was proud there was a school for black children.

It was given the name Thierry School. The facility was simple, Mrs. Gauthier said.

"It had one door in back, one in front. There was no ceiling, we could look up and see the shingles. There was one long desk in the middle of the room, with two benches, without backs, on each side."

The school had five grades. Thierry died in 1914.

Two years later, after the Cretien family sold the land where the school stood, another acre of property was purchased.

It was there — the site of the present Plaisance High School — where the Thierry School was located.

There was considerable lobbying to change the name of the school.

Some wanted to name the school after the couple from whom the acre of land was purchased, Mrs. Gauthier said.

She still vividly remembers her own father's contribution to the debate.

"He was sitting with his legs crossed when he said, 'pappa gave the money and found the land for a school for the community. Why not call it the Plaisance School?'"

It was.

When the school was enlarged in 1919, with a \$2,000 donation from Julius Rosenwald, its name became "Rosenwald School," Gauthier said.

On April 11, 1923, Mrs. Gauthier (then-



Submitted Photo

FELIX THIERRY
Plaisance School founder

Margrette (Thierry) graduated from the school, which by then had seven grades.

"I kept my card," she said. Sure enough, Mrs. Gauthier's certificate of graduation is part of her personal papers. She still treasures her grandfather's pioneering role in public education.

"He worked hard for that. He couldn't read. He just figured," Mrs. Gauthier said, "we had to have education.

"It wasn't much of a building, but he did make a start."



Athanas Malveaux, (March 31, 1879 — September 9, 1938). The Community purchased the first three acres of land to build Plaisance School.

They formed a committee to organize and build the first building which presently houses the Music Department.

Some of the committee members were Leonce Jones, Sr., Albert Green, Adolph Joubert, Athanas Malveaux, Mitchell Thierry, Moses Cassimere, Howard Joubert, Bervick Jones, Anthony Roberts, Laetus Malveaux, Sr., Edgar Thierry, Frank Malveaux, Sr., and many others.

**Louisiana State Legislature declares Plaisance
an Official Community, 1979.**



Ted Angello just can't believe his eyes.



Felix Mack
1920-1940

Felix Mack served as the first principal of Plaisance School. He was educated at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama



Lawrence J. Ballard
1940-1944

Lawrence J. Ballard spent 44 years in the St. Landry Parish School System. He received his B.S. in Vocational Agriculture from Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA.



Matthew Millard Guidry
1944-1962

Under Matthew Guidry's administration, Plaisance grew from an elementary school to include a high school. His goal was to provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to work together so that all children could receive an adequate education and to bring closer relations connecting the child, the home and the school in order to further higher education.



Cephas Joubert
1962-1965

Cephas Joubert received a B.S. in Vocational Agriculture, M.A. in Administration and Supervision from Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA.



Willie J. Daniels
1965-1988

Willie J. Daniels attended Charleston Pollard High School of Beaumont, TX. He later obtained a B.A. degree from Southern University and a M.A. from Columbia University in New York City.

He played professional football with Winnipeg, in the Canadian League and coached at Dunbar High School in Washington, LA. In 1965, he became principal of Plaisance High School.



Elgy Sam
1986-1991

Elgy J. Sam earned his elementary and high school education at Plaisance High School. He is remembered as an outstanding track star. His abilities earned him a track scholarship to Southern University. Sam graduated from Southern University with a B. S. in Education and later earned a M.A. in Administration and Supervision. Sam returned to the Plaisance Community and went to work as a teacher/coach for the St. Landry Parish School Board. He earned his 30+ and became principal at Plaisance High School until 1991.

As a principal, Sam touched many young lives, instilling the values of respect, discipline, and hard work to succeed in life.

Pioneering the legacy



in the beginning...