

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION FILE
Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office

Listing Name: Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center
Address: 516 Tillman Street
City: Shelbyville
County: Bedford
Associated MPS: N/A

Listing Date: November 21, 2024
Reference Number: SG100011067



Railway corridor from Lowville to Croghan, New York,
Lowville, SG100010982,
LISTED, 11/18/2024

NEW YORK, NEW YORK COUNTY,
28th Police Precinct Station House,
177 East 104th Street,
New York, SG100010988,
LISTED, 11/18/2024

TENNESSEE, BEDFORD COUNTY,
Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center,
516 Tillman St.,
Shelbyville, SG100011067,
LISTED, 11/21/2024

UTAH, BOX ELDER COUNTY,
Spiral Jetty,
North Shore of the Great Salt Lake,
Corinne vicinity, SG100011066,
LISTED, 11/15/2024

VIRGINIA, RICHMOND INDEPENDENT CITY,
Hickory Hill School,
3000 East Belt Boulevard,
Richmond, SG100011128,
LISTED, 11/22/2024

WASHINGTON, PIERCE COUNTY,
Asberry, Nettie J. and Henry J., House,
1219 South 13th Street,
Tacoma, SG100010930,
LISTED, 10/31/2024

WEST VIRGINIA
Frontier Forts of West Virginia MPS,
MC100011001,
COVER DOCUMENTATION APPROVED, 11/18/2024

WEST VIRGINIA, GREENBRIER COUNTY,
Arbuckle's Fort,
Blaker's Mill Road,
Alderson, MP100011010,
LISTED, 11/18/2024
(Frontier Forts of West Virginia MPS)

WEST VIRGINIA, POCAHONTAS COUNTY,
Warwick's Fort,

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center
Other names/site number Rosenwald Recreation and Community Building;
Couch, A.C., Community Center; Shelbyville Early Head Start
Name of related multiple property listing N/A
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

2. Location

Street & Number: 516 Tillman St.
City or town: Shelbyville State: Tennessee County: Bedford
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A Zip: 37160

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D


October 15, 2024
Signature of certifying official/Title: _____ Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of Commenting Official: _____ Date
Title: _____ State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

 Signature of the Keeper

 Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	1	sites
2	0	structures
0	2	objects
4	3	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Education/ School

Social/ Clubhouse

Recreation and Culture/ Outdoor Recreation

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social/ Clubhouse

Recreation and Culture/ Outdoor Recreation

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, Brick, Asphalt, Synthetics/Vinyl

Narrative Description

The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center was originally constructed in 1946 and expanded and renovated c. 1965 and c. 1973 to its current appearance. The L-shaped one-story concrete block building has a gabled asphalt shingle roof with a variety of window configurations. The center is set within a historically Black neighborhood at 516 Tillman Street in Shelbyville, Bedford County Tennessee, and its 3.53-acre lot features historic and non-historic playground equipment and greenspace that has served local families and children since the center’s original construction.

Setting

The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center retains its location and setting in a historically Black neighborhood in Shelbyville, Tennessee, approximately 0.70 miles northwest of the Shelbyville Courthouse Square (NR Listed 10/27/1982). A result of race-based residential segregation during the Jim Crow era, the community center is surrounded by African American churches, including Brights Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC) on Elm Street, Mt. Zion Baptist Church on Hill Street, and Scott United Methodist Church on Morton Street. Also in the vicinity is the former locations of Black schools, including the McAdams School, Bedford County Training School, and Harris High School, which were all located on Elm Street

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from 1923-1966. Federally funded housing projects, originally designated for Black residents, are located west of the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center building on Morton Street, Tillman Street, Purdy Court, and Key Street. A segregated swimming pool for Blacks was located at Purdy Court Park which is northwest of the building at Purdy Court and Jessica Lane. ¹ Located 0.3 miles to the northeast of the community center is the James Gilliland House, listed in the National Register of Historic Places on May 12, 1975 for its importance as an example of Black stonemason James Gilliland's work.

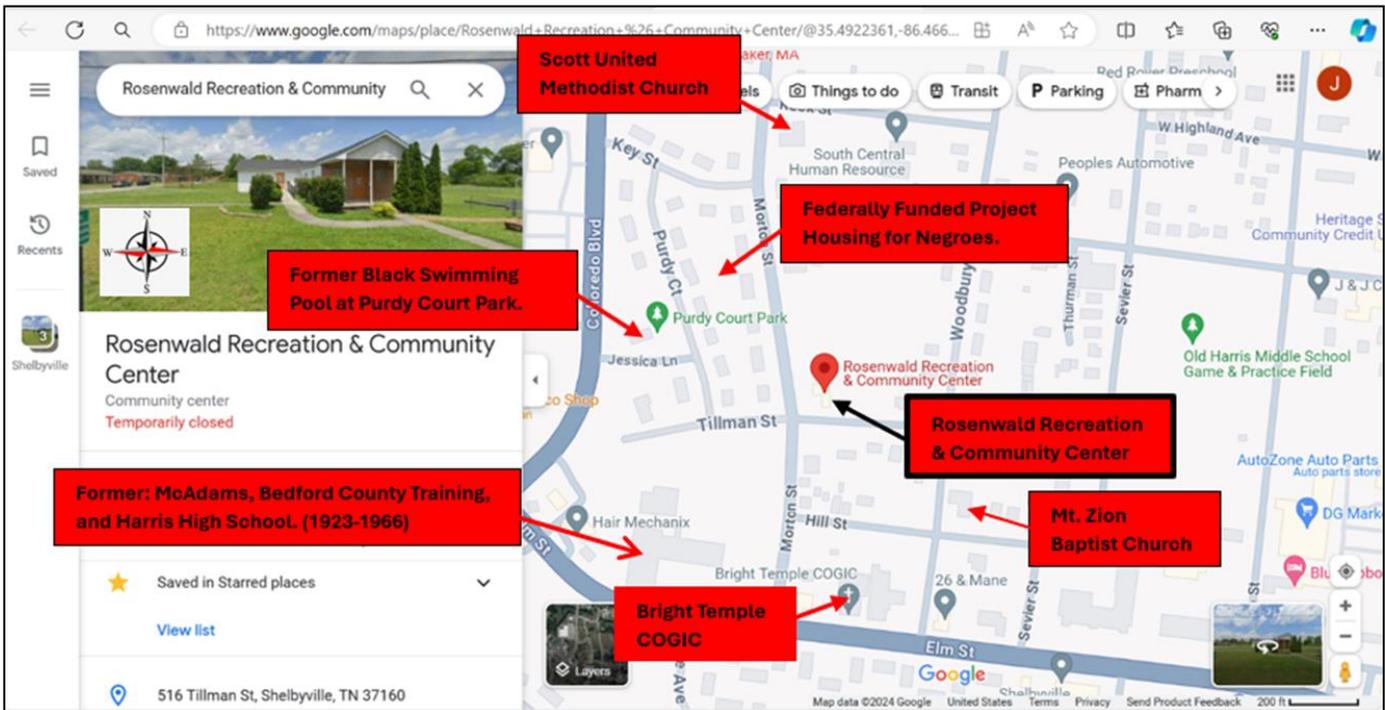


Figure 1. Neighborhood map showing the location of the Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center, the African American churches, the former Black schools, the Black swimming pool, and the housing projects for Black residents. Base imagery courtesy of Google Maps. Map by Janet Smith.

Site
The majority of the center's 3.53-acre lot is flat and grassy. It historically featured a basketball court (non-extant), baseball field, and open greenspace. To the west side of the building, within the boundary, is a small, paved parking lot alongside Morton Street.

1. Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center, 1946, c. 1965, c. 1973 Contributing Building

Building's Evolution

As constructed in 1946, the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center was designed as a one-story, rectangular building with concrete block walls set on a poured concrete foundation with three front steps and gabled roof with shingles. The interior consisted of a large open space that originally could be divided with a movable partition. The primary (south) façade wall contained double exit doors, with a possible back exit

¹ Bobby L. Lovett, *The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee: A Narrative History* (Nashville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 77.

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door on the north wall, a possible steel pivot window in the back-north wall, four steel pivot windows on the east wall, four steel pivot windows on the west wall, and two small pivot windows on the south facade wall. The exterior façade wall (south) was layered with slate.

The first addition in c. 1965 was a kitchen and a bathroom with storage added to the back of the building (north elevation). The façade was also changed from the three front steps to the present appearance with a full-width front-gabled porch. The façade's wall material was changed from slate to red brick veneer. The double front doors changed to a single metal exit door, and an office and sink for hand washing was added to the back-north wall of the main room.

The second addition in c. 1973 was a second classroom with a storage closet added to the west side of the c. 1965 addition, bringing the center to its current L-shape footprint. It has an entry door into the second bathroom, an entry door into the kitchen, an entry door into the first classroom, a front, metal exit door that faces south at Tillman Street with a small concrete porch, and an attached sloped concrete ramp with black metal railings. Laundry connections and a second bathroom with entry through the kitchen was added to the first bathroom in the c. 1965 addition, possibly in 1973 or 1999.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Rosenwald Recreation Center is a one-story L-shaped building with a gabled asphalt shingle roof. All walls are painted concrete block and are set on a poured concrete foundation, unless otherwise described. All windows are four-light steel casement windows with concrete sills, unless otherwise described. All doors are single leaf.

South Elevation (Façade)

The south elevation's front door entry faces south toward Tillman Street. The facade consists of a c. 1965 full-width front-gabled porch supported by four wood 4x4 posts. The porch has an unpainted concrete block foundation and poured concrete floor. The porch is accessed by two concrete steps on the south or a small aluminum access ramp with a wood handrail on the west side. The building's façade is covered with a c. 1965 red brick running bond veneer. There is centered a single-leaf red metal door, flanked by two small windows with two flood lights above the door. There are three cedar trees at the southeast side of the porch, and two bushes on the west side of the porch with the aluminum access ramp and wood handrail in the middle of the two bushes. A concrete sidewalk leads from the front steps down to Tillman Street. There are red paver blocks on the east side of the sidewalk that lead to the c.1999 fenced-in playground area. There is another concrete sidewalk on the west side of the sidewalk that curves northwest and north to the c. 1973 addition and to the west-side parking lot on Morton Street.

Connecting to the exterior entrance on the c. 1973 addition, the sidewalk is at a slight incline and has a black metal railing on both sides, as well as additional bushes. The addition's entrance is a single-leaf red metal door with two floodlights attached nearby. A 2/2 steel window is to the west of the door.

East Elevation

On the east elevation of the building are three windows, a covered window bay, a six-panel door that enters the kitchen, and a covered exit door with concrete sill that would have entered the bathroom and storage area beside the kitchen. The wall has an attached power utility pole and meter box and numerous electrical wires

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along the side of the wall that enter the building for electricity and from a split-level heat and air conditioner unit.

North Elevation

The north elevation consists of the first addition (kitchen and bathroom facility) built c.1965 with a gabled roof and the second additional classroom added to its west side c. 1973. There is vinyl siding in the gable field. There are three windows on the north elevation, two of the windows are two-light steel windows on the c. 1965 addition, and a 2/2 steel window on the c. 1973 addition.

West Elevation

Visible on the west elevation is the c. 1973 addition and the original 1946 section. The c. 1973 section has vinyl siding and a rectangular louvered vent in the gable field. Centered on the first level is a window bay infilled with wood and an air conditioning unit. The 1946 section has three windows, one of which has been infilled with an air condition unit.

INTERIOR

The first classroom, built in 1946, has interior concrete block walls that are covered with drywall and painted white gold, with a metal push bar front door that exits on the (south) primary façade wall. To the east side of the door is a pull station fire alarm system and on the west side is a fire extinguisher. At the northeast corner are partition walls for an office, accessed via a wood Dutch door. Adjacent to the office is a half-wall, a sink for hand washing, and a wood Dutch door that leads into the c. 1965 addition to the building which has a kitchen and bathroom with a storage area. A wood Dutch door on the west wall leads to the c. 1973 addition. The ceiling consists of suspended drop-in ceiling panels with tubular florescent lighting. The floor consists of glued down vinyl tiles and carpet.

The first addition was a kitchen and a bathroom facility with a storage area. c.1965. The kitchen has interior concrete block walls that are covered with drywall and currently painted brown. The floor is covered with vinyl tile. The ceiling is a suspended drop-in ceiling panels with tubular florescent lighting. On the south wall there are kitchen cabinets with a three-compartment sink, a Dutch Door that enters the original section, and then a stove beside the door entry. The west wall has a wood Dutch door entering the c. 1973 addition. The north wall has a fire extinguisher, a refrigerator, a stand-up freezer, kitchen cabinets, and then a door entry into the bathroom and storage facility. There are kitchen cabinets with a singular sink beside the door. The bathroom also has a second bathroom and a stackable washer & dryer added to it possibly c.1973 or c.1999. The east wall has a pull station fire alarm system to the north of an exit door and has a fire extinguisher to the south of the exit door.

The second additional room was a second classroom with a storage closet, built c. 1973. The concrete block walls are painted white gold. The storage closet is formed by a partition wall covered with drywall and accessed via a wood door. The east wall has a wood door into the second bathroom, a Dutch wood door into the kitchen, and a Dutch wood door into the 1946 section. There is also an original window that was built in 1946 on the east wall that has been changed to a solid glass window to see into the other room. On the south wall there is a metal push bar exit door, with a pull station fire alarm system on the east side of the door.

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2. Back Stop Batting Cage, c.1946-1950s

Contributing Structure

The back stop batting cage is located at the northwest corner of the community center building. The back stop batting cage frame is comprised of blue metal pipes that are welded together and were painted in 2023. It formerly had rusted chicken wire attached around the frame. It is in the process of being re-caged.

3. Monkey Bars, c.1946-1950s

Contributing Structure

The monkey bars are located at the far east side of the property, believed to have been built around 1946-1950s. It is still in its original location with thin metal bars connected like links with rusted screws holding them together. The monkey bars are considered to be in poor condition but still retain integrity.

4. Green Space, c. 1946

Contributing Site

The majority of the property's lot is flat and grassy green space, which was historically used for outdoor recreation. A basketball court was formerly located towards the north edge of the lot; its location is marked by a lack of grass. The site as a whole was important for the community's center use for social and educational activities and therefore is considered contributing.

5. Signs, c.1999

Non-contributing Object

There is a landscaped area with 3 metal poles, two of which once held a sign for the Early Head Start when it was leasing the building. The third pole currently holds a "No Loitering" sign. The poles and sign are located south of the building. They are non-contributing due to age.

6. Playground, c.1999, c. 2021

Non-contributing Site

The South Central Human Resource Agency leased the building from 1999 to 2020 for an Early Head Start Program. They built a toddlers playground equipment on soft mulch inside of a metal chain-link fence located east of the building. Within the fenced area is also a toddler's wood, pink playhouse with a mulched walked trail, a 10 x 12 canopy shade structure with a toddler's picnic table, and kitchenette set. In 2021, the Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center had a Community Garden Program, which was directed by Mr. Tyler Campbell. He built a set of three community garden beds and taught the children how to plant lettuce, turnip greens, and radishes. The garden beds are also located inside the fenced playground area.

For ease, the fenced area is collectively inventoried as a site and all features are non-contributing due to age.

7. Community Center Sign, c.2021

Non-contributing Object

Wood sign that was made and donated by Mrs. Janet Smith titled "Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center 516 Tillman Street." It is located southwest of the building, adjacent to Tillman Street.

Integrity

The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center retains its location and setting in the historically African American neighborhood in Shelbyville, Tennessee. The community center retains historic materials, design, and workmanship, as evidenced by its concrete block construction, façade porch and brick veneer, and historic windows, all dating to the historic era of its original construction in 1946 and historic renovations/additions in c. 1965, and c. 1973. The property also retains its greenspace and some playground equipment that were historically used for outdoor recreation and social events. The property has a strong association with the history of the Shelbyville Black community's social life and efforts to provide early

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education opportunities. Given the strength of its physical aspects of integrity and association, the property has a high degree of feeling and overall integrity.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Education

Social History

Period of Significance
1946 – 1974

Significant Dates

c. 1965

c. 1973

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)
Property is:

N/A

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

See continuation sheet

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center is eligible under Criterion A for its local significance in the educational and social life of the surrounding Black community. Built in 1946 using funds originally intended for a Rosenwald school, the property was a vital and important place for local African Americans in the area, particularly for young children who attended kindergarten classes at the center, as well as older children who attended arts and crafts classes and utilized the property's outdoor recreation opportunities. The center's period of significance begins with its construction in 1946 and ends at the default 50-year cutoff in 1974, reflecting the center's ongoing importance in the community's educational and social life.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Brief Contextual History of Shelbyville and Bedford County

Bedford County was created in 1807 when the citizens petitioned the governor to split Rutherford County and named the new county after American Revolutionary War officer Thomas Bedford. The county was steadily reduced to form Coffee County (1836), Moore County (1871), Lincoln County (1809), and Marshall County (1836).² At the time, Bedford County's landscape was characterized by dense canebrakes and vast forests with little settlement. The county's abundance of rich soil and riverside gave rise to pre-civil war plantation economies with corn mills, cotton gins, and river-related commerce.³

Like most Tennessee counties, Bedford County's agricultural economy relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans. The 1860 census recorded 21,584 people in Bedford County, of which 6,744 were enslaved (approximately 31%) while fifty-two were free Black or mixed race.⁴ Prominent Shelbyville leaders, such as John Eakin, owned slaves, as did at least a dozen other white Bedford County residents. For example, the 1860 census recorded 74 people enslaved to E. A. Moseley in Bedford County, Tennessee. Their ages were from four months old to 75 years old.⁵

Shelbyville, the county seat of Bedford County, Tennessee, was laid out in 1810, incorporated in 1819, and named after Issac Shelby, a hero of the Revolutionary War. Shelbyville has been accustomed to misfortune throughout its history, as well as racial strife. A tornado, locally known as the "Big Storm," hit in May of 1830 demolishing the town and killing five persons. Three years later, Asiatic cholera decimated the population, followed by outbreaks in 1866 and 1873. The year of 1902 saw a flood with much damage and suffering. In 1934 racial strife broke out when a young Black man, E.K. Harris, was accused of assault. One hundred national guardsmen were called to protect him and managed to move him from the jail by disguising

² "Historical Information," Bedford County Tennessee, https://www.bedfordcountyttn.gov/historical_information.php, Accessed March 29, 2024.

³ *History of Tennessee* (Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887), 861. Accessed April 2, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/historyoftennes01good/page/860/mode/2up>.

⁴ Classified Population for State of Tennessee, 1860 U.S. Census, accessed July 22, 2024, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-33.pdf>.

⁵ Stacey Martin. "Slaves of Edward Archer Moseley, Tennessee" *WikiTree online*, https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Category:Bedford_County%2C_Tennessee%2C_Slave_Owners, Accessed April 1, 2024; "Category: Bedford County, Tennessee, Slave Owners" *WikiTree*, online https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Category:Bedford_County%2C_Tennessee%2C_Slave_Owners, Accessed 4-4-2024.

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him as a guardsman. While Harris was sent to Nashville for his safety, a lynch mob burned the Bedford County Courthouse in retaliation.⁶

History and Significance of the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center

The creation of the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center resulted from a long struggle of Black Shelbyville residents to create quality school facilities for their children. Between 1866 and 1955, the State of Tennessee enacted twenty ‘Jim Crow’ racial segregation laws, including six requiring school segregation. The 1869 law declared that no citizen could be excluded from the University of Tennessee because of race or color but then mandated that instructional facilities for Black students be separate from those used by white students.⁷ In 1896, the United States Supreme Court legally upheld racial segregation laws, declaring segregation legal as long as each race had equal facilities. In reality, few facilities for Black citizens were equal to those for whites.

Schools, in particular, were the site of struggle for equal facilities and opportunities. The first public school for Blacks in Bedford County was known as "Slip Up," located about two miles out of town on the Fayetteville Highway. The first teacher, in 1889, was Professor R. P. Purdy. Between 1889 and 1894, there were twenty-seven one-or-more-teacher schools established in Bedford County for Blacks in various communities. The first public school in Shelbyville for Blacks was a four-room school, organized in 1886. The first public high school was organized in 1895. The principal was Professor John McAdams, and the school was named for him – “McAdams School.” Professor McAdams was the principal for forty years.⁸ The school originally stopped at grade 10 but added grades 11 and 12 in 1923.⁹

After the McAdams School came a joint venture of the county and the city. The name of the new school was Bedford County Training School, located on Elm Street. The principal was Professor Sidney Harris. He remained the principal from 1935 until 1965. In 1961, the school's name was changed to Harris High School in honor of Professor Harris. In 1965, Will P. Martin become the principal of Harris High School. He remained principal until the school was merged with Central High School in 1967.¹⁰

⁶ Bettye Liberty, “Shelbyville and Bedford County History Facts,” *TnGenWeb*, November 23, 2023, <https://tngenweb.org/bedford/shelbyville-and-bedford-county-history-facts/> Accessed March 29, 2024; Timothy C. Marsh and Helen C. Marsh, “Bedford County,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Tennessee Historical Society, October 8, 2017, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/bedford-county/>, accessed March 29, 2024.

⁷ “(1866) JIM CROW LAWS: TENNESSEE, 1866-1955”, Black Past, B. (2011, January 03). *BlackPast.org*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/jim-crow-laws-tennessee-1866-1955/>, accessed March 29, 2024

⁸ “About Our School” Shelbyville Central High School (*bedfordk12tn.com*) https://schs.bedfordk12tn.com/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1687386&type=d&pREC_ID=1843741, accessed March 28, 2024.

⁹ “Bedford County Training School for Negroes”: *Wikipedia*, online, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedford_County_Training_School_for_Negroes, accessed March 30, 2024

¹⁰ “About Our School” Shelbyville Central High School (*bedfordk12tn.com*) https://schs.bedfordk12tn.com/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1687386&type=d&pREC_ID=1843741, accessed March 28, 2024

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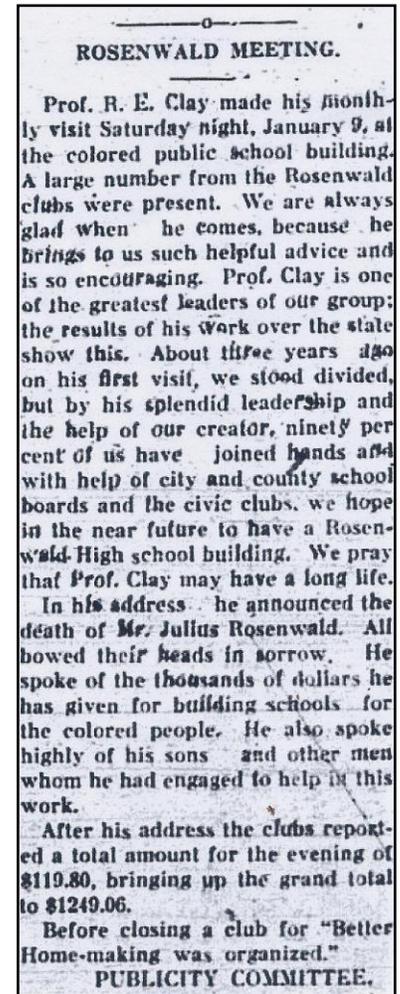
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In and around 1929, African American citizens were concerned about the conditions of the McAdams school and decided they needed better accommodation for the children. With hopes of working with the city and county officials to establish better school facilities for the Black children, a few of the African American people of Shelbyville organized clubs to fundraise.¹¹ Known as the Rosenwald Clubs, the organizations held monthly meetings beginning in 1929 with a Rosenwald Building Agent from Nashville whose name was Professor Robert E. Clay. Professor Clay was hired by officials of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a philanthropic venture by Sears, Roebuck and Company co-owner Julius Rosenwald to provide funding for African American schools, primarily in the South where education for Blacks was chronically underfunded. The Rosenwald Fund required that communities raise a portion of the necessary finances needed to build and maintain schools, as well as find suitable land and labor for construction¹²

Over the next few years, Rosenwald Clubs members raised approximately \$1,700, including gifts as small as ten cents, for such a purpose. In 1936, members purchased two lots of land "for the purpose of establishing a better school facility for colored children," one from Wade Hampton Gosling and one adjoining from Johnson Thompson and wife Lela Thompson, totaling approximately five acres of land. The Clubs gave the land to the Shelbyville public schools for a new Black school that was agreed to be named after W. H. Gosling.¹³

However, the city and county decided to raze McAdams High School in 1939 and built the Bedford County Training School. They later added a new cafeteria that opened on January 4, 1954, and constructed a gym, which opened on January 28, 1954. Therefore, they did not need the funds that was raised and donated, nor did they need the land that was purchased by the Rosenwald Clubs.



Newspaper Clipping,
approximately January 9, 1932.
From Collection of Drexal
Nelson.

¹¹ A.C. Couch, T.C. Cortner, L.V. Dowall, Minnie Dean, Rev Ross Fishback, John Green, Rev. J.M. Mullins, Ernest Campbell, & Sam Johnson Complainants vs. No. 4217. Town of Shelbyville, J.B. Frierson, Secretary & Treasurer & Minnie Dean, Defendants. Chancery Court, Book 54 pg.142, Court Records, Bedford County Archives, Shelbyville, Tennessee.

¹² Bobby L. Lovett, "Robert E. Clay," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, October 8, 2017, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/robert-e-clay/>. Accessed March 31, 2024; Newspaper Clipping "Rosenwald Meeting" approximately January 9, 1932, Collection of Drexal Nelson; Russell Brooker, "The Rosenwald Schools: An Impressive Legacy of Black-Jewish Collaboration for Negro Education," *ABHM. America's Black Holocaust Museum*. Archived from the original on June 15, 2013; Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

¹³ Johnson & Lela Thompson. et ux to Shelbyville, July 6, 1936, Deed Book 39, Page 495, Bedford County Register of Deeds, Shelbyville, Tennessee; W.H. Gosling to Shelbyville, June 26, 1936, Deed Book 39, Page 367, Bedford County Register of Deeds.

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In 1945, Rosenwald Clubs Trustees filed suit to recoup their donations and divest title of the lots of land back to the organization. After a couple of court appearances with the City of Shelbyville on June 21 and July 20, 1945, the funds and the land were returned to the Rosenwald Clubs from the City of Shelbyville Public Schools. As suggested by the courts, the Rosenwald organization decided that they would build a Community Center named the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Building on the purchased land for “the use, benefit, and education of all colored people of Bedford County.”¹⁴ The center ultimately did not receive funding from the Rosenwald Fund, but the name was a fitting tribute to the efforts of the local Rosenwald Clubs who sought to improve schools for Black children.

The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center Building was built in or around July 1946. While not built for the sole purpose of a school, the center provided early education for children, as well as a variety of activities including tutoring, art classes, family festivals, and food distributions. It was also available for rental by the Black community. The center’s large lot was used for various outdoor sports, such as baseball and basketball, as well as band practice for students from the nearby Bedford County Training School. There was also a playground with a variety of equipment, such as the extant Monkey Bars.

Numerous Shelbyville residents fondly remember the impact the community center had on their lives, particularly those that attended the center’s programs as children or used the center’s outdoor recreational areas. For them, the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center was part of their formative years and prepared them for later attendance at Shelbyville’s public schools. The center also allowed them to form bonds and friendships, some which last today as some are still part of the Rosenwald Community Center organization.

Birdie Smith recalled going to the community center when she was a little girl in the 1950s. She remembered weaving a basket and doing all kinds of crafts. She also attended dances.¹⁵ Rose Peacock also remembered doing arts and crafts at the center during summer break in the late 1950s. There were ping pong tables, horseshoes, croquet, dominoes, and basketball. At the end of the summer break, they had a big luncheon for all the kids, and they would get to take home all their arts and crafts. To her memory, everything was funded by grants and donations.¹⁶

In addition to community events and summer arts and crafts, several people remember attending kindergarten classes in the center. Through much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most students in Tennessee did not attend kindergarten. The earliest kindergartens in Tennessee began about 1890 but were private, segregated, and usually located in cities. Efforts to establish publicly funded kindergartens accelerated when Senate Bill 290 of 1917 was passed, allowing school officials to create kindergartens, but

¹⁴ A.C. Couch, T.C. Cortner, L.V. Dowall, Minnie Dean, Rev Ross Fishback, John Green, Rev. J.M. Mullins, Ernest Campbell, & Sam Johnson Complainants vs. No. 4217. Town of Shelbyville, J.B. Frierson, Secretary & Treasurer & Minnie Dean, Defendants. Chancery Court, Book 54 pg.142, Court Records, Bedford County Archives, Shelbyville, Tennessee.

¹⁵ Birdie Smith, “Summer Break Program” interview by phone with Janet Smith, 11-14-2023.

¹⁶ Rose Peacock. “Summer Break Program” interview by Janet Smith at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024.

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by the 1930s most school systems had still not established kindergarten programs.¹⁷ It was not until 1993 that children were required to attend kindergarten before entering First Grade. By that time, 98% of students already voluntarily attended kindergarten.¹⁸ However, in the 1950s and 1960s, Black students often had few options for early childhood education.¹⁹ The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center's kindergarten program, therefore, filled a vital need in the community.

Drexal Nelson recalled going to kindergarten at the Community Center from 1958-1960. He said his two teachers were Mrs. Katie Brame and Mrs. Christine Smith. He said his courses were reading, writing, and arithmetic. He remembered getting in trouble during nap time, because he kept raising his head to see if it was time to go outside to play. There were about fifteen children in his class. He said he went to school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and he attended the summer program at the center during summer break also, which was ran by Mrs. Marilyn Massengale and Mrs. Mattie (Thompson) Steward.²⁰

Lendell Massengale attended kindergarten at the Community Center in 1961. His mother shared a copy of his graduation picture for display at the Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center Building (see Figure 3). Some of the students' names are Lendell Massengale Jr., Shree Blakemore, Martha Tillman, Lawson Tillman, Thomas Holbert, Janet Chunn, Rita Albernathy, Lynn Harvey, Michael Parks, Thomas Tillman, Anderson Buchanan. There are five students whose names are currently unknown.²¹

Sheila Batts remembered attending the community center in 1961 and learning from Mrs. Brame and Mrs. Smith. She said there were about thirty children in her class, though she remembers they used a foldable partition board to separate the younger kids from the older kids that were getting ready to go to first grade. She also remembered that the teachers always did a head count of the children to turn into the nearby Bedford County Training School so the children could get hot lunches.²²

Around 1965, the community center was expanded to include the kitchen addition. The center's expansion also coincided with the federal government's creation of Project Head Start, which began as an eight-week summer program serving low-income children with a variety of social and educational services.²³ Mattie Harris worked for one year as a kindergarten teacher-assistant in 1961 for Mrs. Katie Brame. She remembered that in 1966 Mrs. Massengale ran a "Summer HeadStart Program" for two months. The head start program was administered by the Elk & Duck River Agency using federal funding. She said that the

¹⁷ Anne Peavey and Louise Tarpley, "The Kindergarten Movement in Tennessee," in *History of the kindergarten movement in the mid-western states and in New York. Presented at the Cincinnati convention, Association for childhood education, April 19023, 1938, 59-62.* Accessed July 22, 2024, https://cscce.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/1938_ACEI-Midwest-and-NY.pdf.

¹⁸ Cornell Christian, "Kindergarten is 1st stop for '93-94 first-graders," *The Commercial Appeal*, July 19, 1992.

¹⁹ Charles E. Cunningham and D. Keith Osborn, "A Historical Examination of Blacks in Early Childhood Education," *Young Children* 34, no. 3 (March 1979): 20-29.

²⁰ Drexal Nelson, "Kindergarten School & Summer Break Program," phone interview with Janet Smith, 11-14-2023.

²¹ Lendell Jr. Massengale, "Kindergarten School" communication through his brother (Carvel Massengale) by phone interview with Janet Smith, 10-5-2023.

²² Sheila Batts, "Kindergarten School", interview by Janet Smith at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024.

²³ "Head Start," Tennessee Department of Education, accessed July 22, 2024, <https://www.tn.gov/education/districts/early-learning/head-start.html>.

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teachers went to many training workshops in Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga. She came back as a Head Start program teacher in 1988 and worked with an assistant teacher named Carolyn Murray. They worked for the South Central Human Resource Agency. Murray remembered that the building looked the same then as it does now.²⁴



Rosenwald Center's Kindergarten Class 1961

"Some" of the students on this picture are:

Lendell Massengale Jr., Shree Blakemore, Martha Tillman, Lawson Tillman, Thomas Holbert, Janet Chunn, Rita Abernathy, Lynn Harvey, Michael Parks, Thomas Tillman, Anderson Buchanan

I am not sure what name was used for the building during this time, the community called it many names other than the Rosenwald Recreation & Community Building. This picture was taken at the front of the Rosenwald Building before the addition of the second room. Picture provided by Mrs. Marilyn Massengale, information from Lendell Massengale Jr., and Anderson Buchanan.

Figure 3. "Kindergarten Class 1961" graduation picture at the Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center Building. Picture was provided by Mrs. Marilyn Massengale.

²⁴ Mattie Harris, "Kindergarten School Teacher Assistant, Head start Teacher", phone interview with Janet Smith, 11-14-2023, Interview by Janet Smith at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt, and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024; Carolyn Murray, "Head-start Teacher Assistant," phone interview with Janet Smith, 12-10-2023.

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While many people remembered attending the Community Center as a young child, others visited the center at an older age. Glenn Johnson remembered playing baseball on the fields behind (north) of the center from 1961 to 1964. As a member of the Bedford County Training School Band, he remembered rehearsing on the field and even still remembers all of the march steps. Johnson was also part of the construction crew that expanded the center with its final addition in 1973. In addition to Johnson, the crew consisted of Gardner Smith, Ell T. Biggers, Allen Cecil Ray, G. W. Ray, Perry Arnold, Huley Arnold, Henrey B. Hamilton, Sean McLain, Tommy Anderson, Roney Harvey, Charles Fishback, John W. Ewing, Billy Bryant, Raymond Buster, W. J. Mitchell, Therom Hix, Tony Hill, and William Fowler.²⁵

The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center continued to be an important asset of the community in the 1980s and 1990s. Calvin Ewing was a member of the Invaders club, and he recalled that they rented the building out for parties and had fish-fries in the 1990s. The Frontiers clubs also had events there in the 1990s. He said that he joined the Rosenwald organization in 1995 and that they held regular monthly meetings there until 1998 or 1999 when they began having their meetings at each other's houses because the Rosenwald organization decided to sign a 20-year contract leasing the building out to the South Central Human Resource Agency for an Early HeadStart Program.²⁶ After the lease ended, the Rosenwald organization opened the center back up for the use of the community in 2020.

The African American people had to endure a long history of racial abuse, mistreatment, and unequal justices. The Rosenwald Recreation and Community Center was built because of segregation and hopes for helping the Black community with better schooling, education, and opportunities. This Community Center has been beneficial to the Black community in coming together with education, value, strength, unity, togetherness, workmanship, and pride. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places will recognize the community center's historical importance and celebrate its long-lasting impact that continues to the present day.

²⁵ Glenn Johnson, "Builder of Second Classroom" in 1973, phone interview with Janet Smith 11-14-2023, Interview at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt, and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024.

²⁶ Calvin Ewing, "Community Center" phone interview with Janet Smith, 11-14-2023. And interview by Janet Smith at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt, and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	X	State Historic Preservation Office	
previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency	
previously determined eligible by the National Register		Federal agency	
designated a National Historic Landmark	X	Local government	
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #		University	
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other	
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #		Name of repository: Bedford County Archives; Bedford County Register of Deeds	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A			

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.53 **USGS Quadrangle** Shelbyville 79-NW

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.491942 | Longitude: -86.464470 |
| 2. Latitude: 35.491996 | Longitude: -86.465260 |
| 3. Latitude: 35.492991 | Longitude: -86.465412 |
| 4. Latitude: 35.492991 | Longitude: -86.464177 |
| 5. Latitude: 35.492889 | Longitude: -86.463716 |
| 6. Latitude: 35.492581 | Longitude: -86.463735 |
| 7. Latitude: 35.492608 | Longitude: -86.464255 |

Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register boundary follows the legal parcel boundaries of Bedford County Tax Parcel number 078P A 001.00 as depicted on the enclosed tax map. The property is bounded by Woodbury St. and adjacent properties to the east, Tillman St. to the south, Morton St. to the west, and adjacent properties to the north. The coordinates above roughly correspond to the major corners of the property.

Boundary Justification

These boundaries encompass all the historic resources associated with the eligible building, including the yard surrounding the building, the old monkey bars to the far east of the building and the back stop batting cage to the north of the building, and greenspace historically used for outdoor recreation.

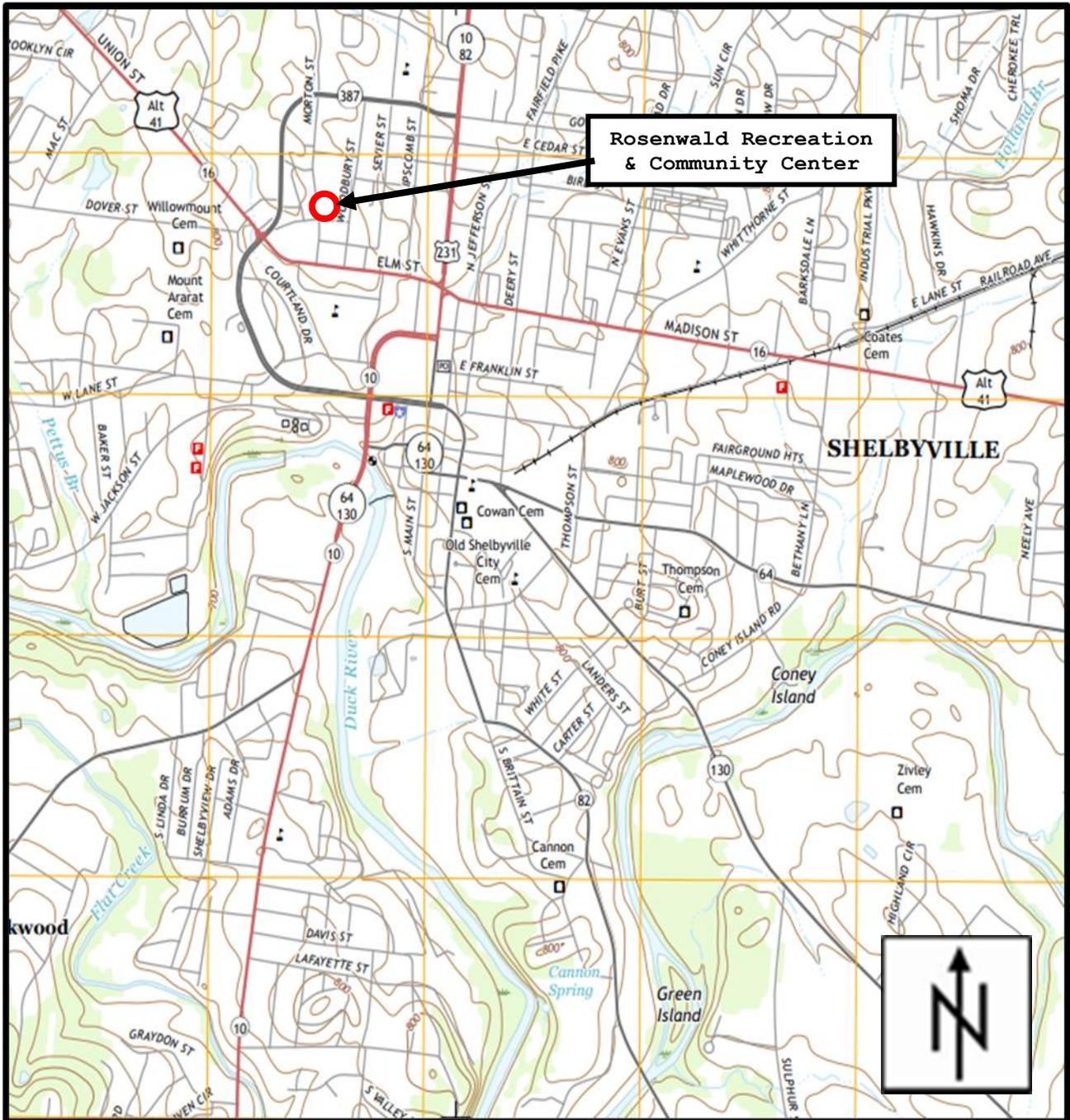
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USGS Topographic Map



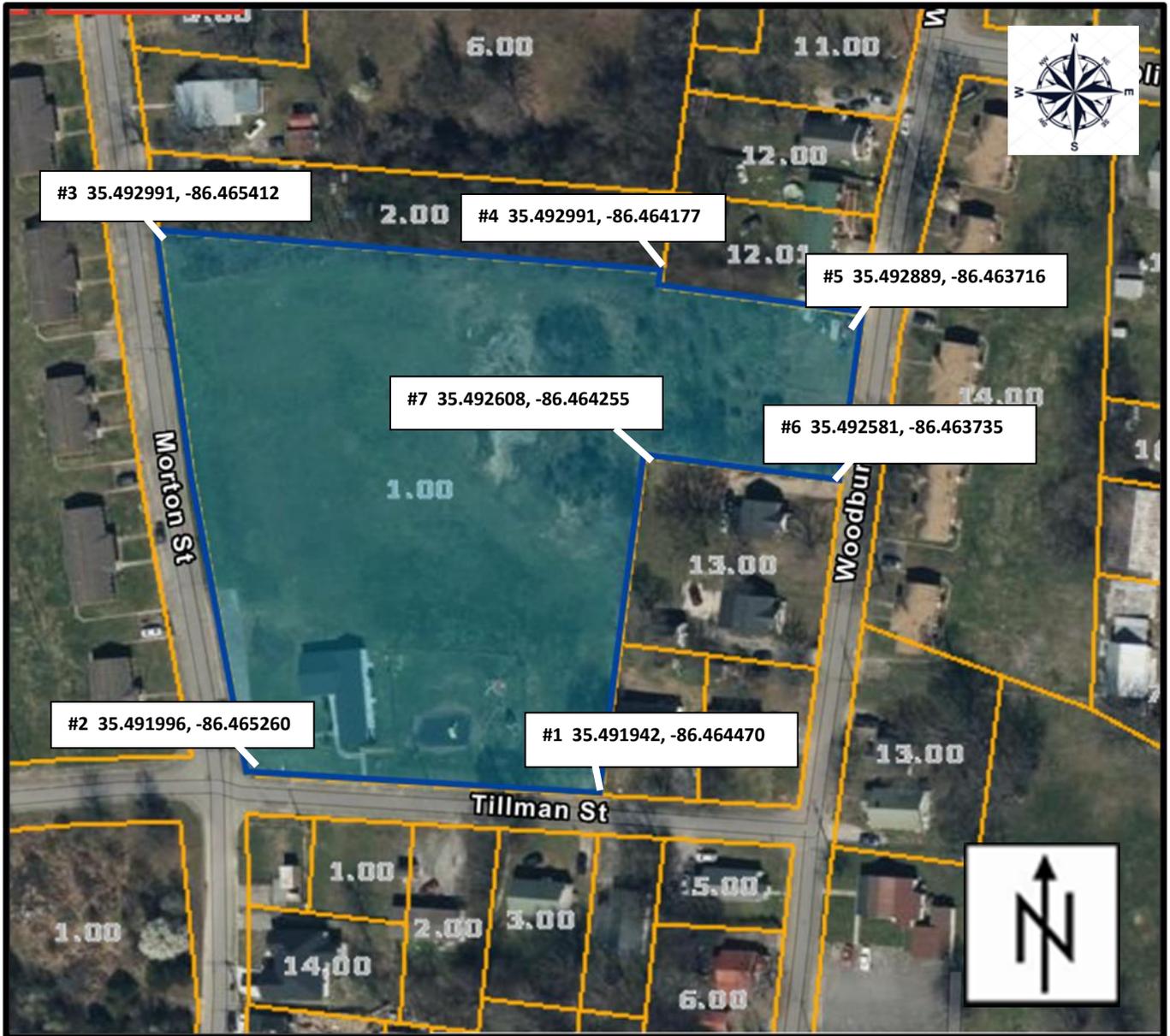
Location of Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center is indicated by the red circle.

Original map scale 1:24,000

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Boundary Map



Legal parcel boundaries of Bedford County Tax Parcel number 078P A 001.00 as depicted on the enclosed tax map. Map provided by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury Property Viewer. Aerial base imagery dated 2021.

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11. Form Prepared By

Name Janet Smith, Secretary

Organization Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center Trustees

Street & Number 424 Fairground Heights Date April 14, 2024

City or Town Shelbyville Telephone (931)536-5767

E-mail smithjanetl68.js@gmail.com State TN. Zip Code 37160

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints. Photos should be submitted separately in a JPEG or TIFF format. Do not embed these photographs into the form)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. can be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps. They can also be embedded in the Section 7 or 8 narratives)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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National Park Service

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center

City or Vicinity: Shelbyville

County: Bedford

State: TN

Photographer: Janet Smith & Rebecca Schmitt

Date Photographed: February 29, 2024 and June 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 19. South Elevation (Façade). Photographer facing north.
- 2 of 19. South and East Elevations. Photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 19. East and North Elevations. Photographer facing southwest.
- 4 of 19. North and West Elevations. Photographer facing southeast
- 5 of 19. West Elevation. Photographer facing east.
- 6 of 19. Rosenwald Sign. Photographer facing southeast.
- 7 of 19. No Loitering Sign and Poles of a Former Sign. Photographer facing north.
- 8 of 19. Playground. Photographer facing east.
- 9 of 19. Monkey Bars. Photographer facing east.
- 10 of 19. Playground, Community Center's North Elevation, and Batting Cage. Photographer facing south.
- 11 of 19. Green Space. Photographer facing northeast.
- 12 of 19. Green Space. Photographer facing north.
- 13 of 19. Green Space and View of Neighboring Public Housing Project. Photographer facing northwest.
- 14 of 19. Interior – South and East walls of original 1946 section. Photographer facing South.
- 15 of 19. Interior – 1946 Section, view of 1965 Office. Photographer facing northeast.

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- 16 of 19. Interior- Kitchen, in First Addition (1965 addition). Photographer facing east.
- 17 of 19. Interior- Community Room in Second Addition (1973 Addition). Photographer facing north.
- 18 of 19. Interior- Community Room in 1973 Addition. Photographer facing southwest.
- 19 of 19. Interior- Community Room and Entrance in 1973 Addition and connecting doorway to original 1946 section. Photographer facing south.

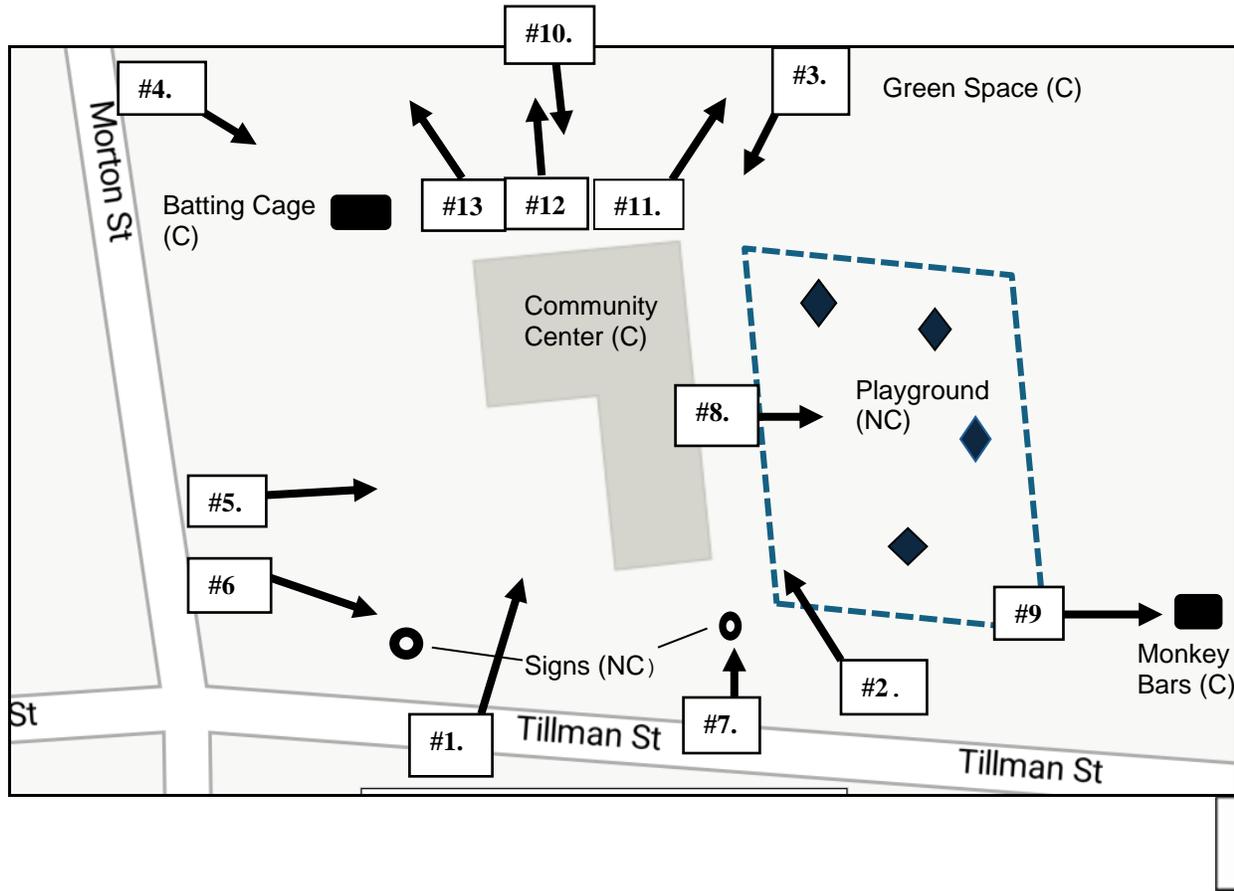
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National Park Service

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Site Plan (Not to scale)



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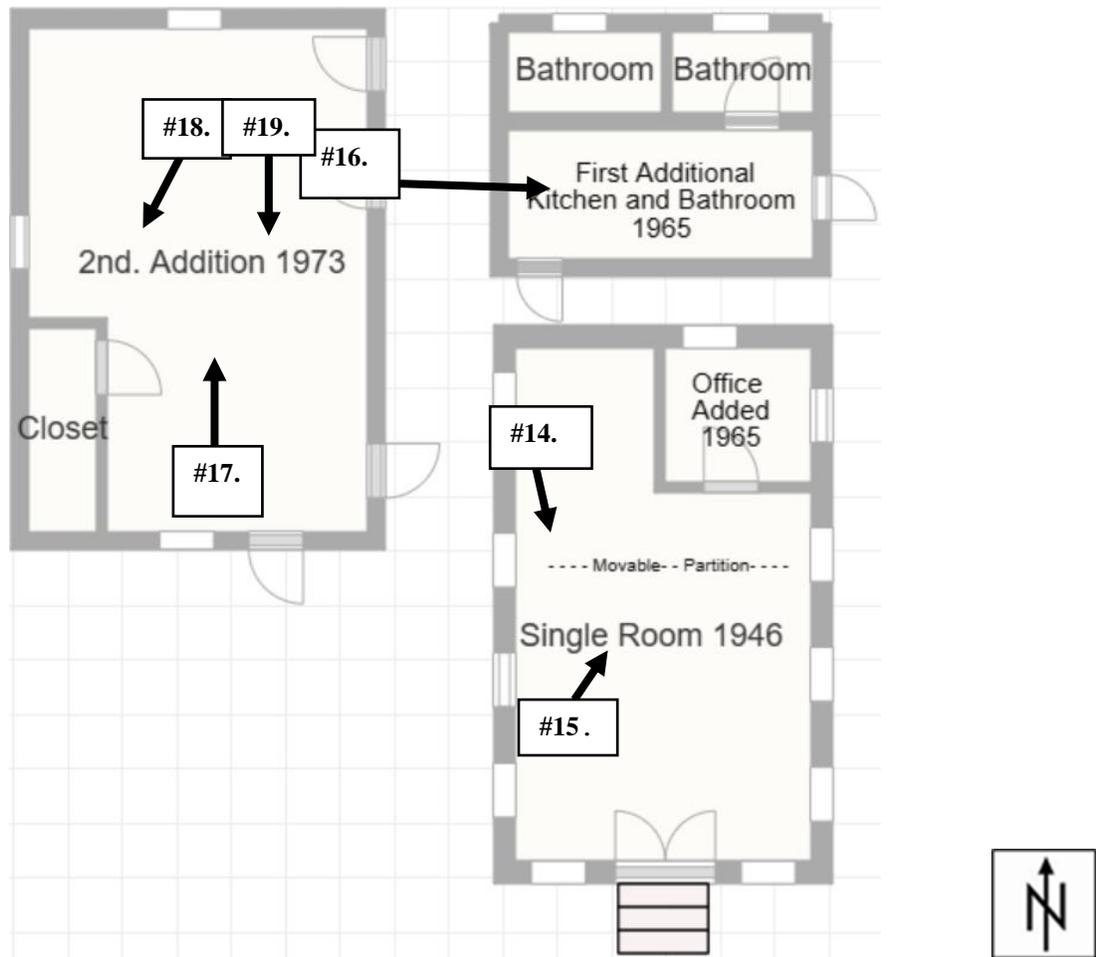
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Floor Plan (Not to Scale)

Note that the sections of the building are shown separately for clarity of the building's evolution. All sections are physically attached, as shown on the site plan and photos.



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National Park Service

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Appendix I: Builders

The builders of the 1946 and c. 1965 additions are currently unknown.

The builders of the 1973 addition include: Glenn Johnson, Gardner Smith, Ell T. Biggers, Allen Cecil Ray, G. W. Ray, Perry Arnold, Huley Arnold, Henrey B. Hamilton, Sean McLain, Tommy Anderson, Roney Harvey, Charles Fishback, John W. Ewing, Billy Bryant, Raymond Buster, W. J. Mitchell, Therom Hix, Tony Hill, and William Fowler.²⁷

²⁷ Glenn Johnson, "Builder of Second Classroom" in 1973, phone interview with Janet Smith 11-14-2023, Interview by Janet Smith at Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center visit with Rebecca Schmitt, and Ethan Holden, 2-29-2024.

Property Owner(s): Rosenwald Recreation & Community Center Trustees

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

Name _____ Secretary, Janet Smith. _____

Street & _____
Number _____ 424 Fairground Heights _____ Telephone _____ (931) 536-5767 _____

City or Town _____ Shelbyville _____ State/Zip _____ TN. 37160 _____



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