

# The Okahumpka Rosenwald School and the Holocaust

Posted by [jashp1](#) on *November 20, 2021* [Edit This](#)

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**November 13, 2021**

**The newest of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation sponsored Julius Rosenwald markers was dedicated in Okahumpka, Florida. The marker is reflective of the historic partnership of Jewish American Julius Rosenwald and the Black Okahumpka community coming together to do good.**

**November 14, 2021**

**“Mr. Klinger,**

**I am very glad you felt the way you did, as your marker is what started the tide rolling the way it is today, so truly the Thanks goes to You and JASHP... And the marker you provided is just beautiful!**

**Chip D'Amico**

**Okahumpka Community Club At-Large Board member & fundraising Chairman.**

**Retired Police Sergeant, City of Geneva in Upstate New York”**

**Ten months earlier, January 2021, Chip reached out into the ether of the web to JASHP asking for help. He had no way of knowing if he would find any, having been frustratingly turned down by many already.**

**Chip wrote: “The Community Club would like to fully restore this historic Julius Rosenwald School, as well as honor the late Julius Rosenwald and Virgil Hawkins.**

**We hope to get our story out about this historic building & location...I figured that an email to you couldn't hurt.”**

**The Okahumpka Community Club, an active organization of Black and White citizenry, whose logo is two hands, one black and one white clasped in commonality and friendship, dreamed of restoring the old school building. It is the finest example of the Rosenwald two-room schoolhouse still standing in Florida.**

**Since, it has been recommended by the State as a candidate of significance to be maintained for Florida's heritage.**

**Nearly 100 years ago, the Okahumpka Rosenwald School was built replacing a one- room ramshackle building, local Black children strugglingly attended. The opportunity, the promise of America through education largely denied to them because of who they were, because of the color of their skin.**

**When Chip contacted JASHP, he had no idea what we might or could do.**

**JASHP does not restore buildings. JASHP does provide interpretive markers, supportive funding, marketing, help with web presence, and consultative services.**

**The help Chip asked for came from the Holocaust.**

**Kind words of appreciation were spoken about JASHP during the dedication. All of which were appreciated.**

**My turn to speak began with a perspective on the why of support for the remote Okahumpka effort.**

**“My father was liberated from the notorious Buchenwald Concentration Camp by American Armed Forces under Patton. He was a prisoner, barely alive because of the crime of his birth. He was a Jew.”**

**There was a noticeable gasp from the audience.**

**‘When my father came to the United States, he settled in Washington, D.C. He saw firsthand what was being done to Black Americans. He saw what he had experienced in Europe for being born a Jew.**

**Growing up, he taught me about survival in the Concentration Camps. He said, if you were alone in the Camps, you died. If you have a friend, you have a chance to live.**

**If your friend fell, you picked them up. If you fell, your friend picked you up.”**

**The social contract of mutuality and commonality to face evil was the message.**

**You will not turn your back or close your eyes to what is happening to the discriminated in this country. What is happening to them could easily happen to you. They can be, they will be, your partners for good.”**

**I looked around the large assembled, and saw heads shaking in agreement, voices of support like at a church meeting rang out.**

“Together, we will do good” I said. “Together, we will make a better America.

When Chip wrote to me asking for help, there never was any question that you would receive it. It is the right thing to do for you. It is the right thing to do for me. It is the right thing to do for us.”

## Okahumpka Rosenwald School

**Julius Rosenwald** was the chairman of Sears Roebuck and Co. in 1908. As a Jewish American, he believed the most serious problem of the United States was the plight of Black Americans. Rosenwald was a close friend of **Booker T. Washington**. Washington had been a slave but rose to become the nationally respected President of Tuskegee Institute (University), an author, orator, and advisor to American Presidents. 1912, Rosenwald became a Trustee of Tuskegee.



Under Washington's guidance, Rosenwald funded a successful pilot program making education accessible to Black Children in Alabama by building school houses.

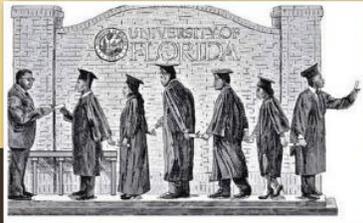
In 1915, Washington died. Rosenwald, continuing Dr. Washington's vision, established the Rosenwald Fund in 1917, "for the well-being of Mankind". When the Rosenwald Fund was terminated in 1948, it had been the catalyst for building over 5,300 schools in 15 States of the South. The Fund provided educational opportunity to 1/3 of all Black American children.

The Rosenwald Fund was based upon a system of matching grants requiring White School Boards and Black-American communities to cooperate together for school construction. Black-American communities contributed \$4.8 million to the building of 127 schools in Florida. In Lake county, ten schools, three shops and one teacher's home were built.

The Okahumpka Rosenwald School was approved by the Lake County Board of Public Instruction in 1929. One-half acre of this school property was donated on May 17, 1930, by **Virgil and Josephine Hawkins**, the parents of Florida Civil Rights leader, Attorney Virgil D. Hawkins, whose 1949-1958 court battles desegregated the University of Florida. Hawkins attended school on this site through the 10th grade in an old ramshackle school that was torn down to accommodate the building of this modern Okahumpka Rosenwald school.



A OKAHUMPKA SCHOOL - 1929



A FUTURE VIRGIL HAWKINS MONUMENT

**Sponsorship**  
The Okahumpka Community Club  
The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation



The text of the marker:

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***Sponsorship – The Okahumpka Community Club, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation.***

**Jerry Klinger is the President of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation**

**[www.JASHP.org](http://www.JASHP.org)**