

# Preserving Georgia's HISTORIC SCHOOLS



Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

## The Legacy of Historic Schools

**S**chools play an important role in our lives. During a large part of our formative years, schools are where we make lifelong friends, learn to read and write, develop skills and learn lessons in sports, music, and other extracurricular activities, join clubs, attend football games and dances, and court boyfriends and girlfriends. School is often the place where we decide what we want to be when we “grow up,” and decisions made there determine who we will become as well as what we will do. Memories of our school years are significant, and preserving the buildings associated with those memories can provide important anchors for individuals and the community.

**Historic schools link generations within a community. Schools are also local landmark buildings—like county courthouses, city halls, and libraries—which are monumental in architecture and rich in associative memories.** W. Ray Luce

Communities in Georgia are growing rapidly, and there is a need for new schools to serve our growing population. However, many of our important historic school buildings, along with newly constructed facilities, can be used to educate additional generations of Georgia's students. Those wishing to abandon



The recently rehabilitated **Academy of Richmond County** (circa 1925) continues to serve its community as a public high school.

historic schools often cite safety, technology, and code issues; however, many of these buildings can be rehabilitated to meet current safety codes and modern-day educational needs and regulations. Old schools can be wired for today's computer and technology-based curriculum. Updates and modernizations can be recommended and accomplished by experienced architects familiar with historic preservation methods. Rehabilitation can often be completed more cheaply than new construction.

Saving historic schools is not only a historic preservation issue—it is also a neighborhood, environmental, land use and community planning issue. Historic schools support neighborhood stability. Students are often able to walk or ride their bikes to school. Their grounds may provide recreational opportunities for nearby residents. Historic schools are vital elements in established neighborhoods.

In Georgia, when we abandon our historic school buildings to build new facilities, often on the outskirts of communities on previously undeveloped farmland, we create a myriad of additional problems. Children must be transported to and from school each day by bus or car; thus decreasing neighborhood cohesiveness and increasing traffic congestion, transportation time, and expenses

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(expenses often not included in looking at the cost of new schools versus old). In addition, farmland and forests are destroyed, and new infrastructure must be built. By rehabilitating and continuing to use historic buildings, we are also recycling existing resources rather than dumping tons of debris from a demolished school into a landfill.

Sprawling new campuses of buildings with a few small windows have become the norm (BELOW RIGHT); however, new research finds that smaller schools are better learning environments for children. Adding windows to windowless school buildings is becoming an important new trend in school design. Smaller, more open schools have been shown to be an important factor in improving students' test scores, and historic schools already meet these physical criteria.

Many of Georgia's historic schools are fine works of architecture and craftsmanship. On the other hand, new generic school buildings with less architectural merit seem to be proliferating around the state on the outskirts of communities.

As illustrated in these photographs of the auditorium (BELOW LEFT) and front entryway (PAGE 1) of the recently rehabilitated historic Academy of Richmond County, a public high school in Augusta built in 1925, *"it is easy to paint walls, fix ceilings, add new lighting—essentially making old spaces look new. However, it is the not-so-obvious opportunities that result from strategic decisions to preserve, enhance and transform, which provide the greatest benefits of renovation...[R]enovation often can result in dramatic, inspiring spaces that might not be economically feasible in new construction."* (A Community Guide to Saving Older Schools).



It is typically cost prohibitive today to build new schools that include the level of architectural design, materials, and quality represented in our historic schools.

As communities in Georgia and their local boards of education decide whether to rehabilitate an existing historic school or build a new one, we at the state's historic preservation office believe that both options should be carefully considered. Many times new is not the best; old schools can be updated to provide a quality educational experience for Georgia's students and teachers. This publication addresses the issues involved in using historic schools for educational purposes through case studies, reference materials, and an overview of efforts to document and preserve Georgia's historic schools.

While not all of our historic schools can continue to be used for their original purpose, they often can serve their communities through adaptive use. This publication examines possible alternative uses for school buildings already abandoned around the state. Also highlighted are actual projects in which schools have been successfully converted into cultural centers, police headquarters, administrative office space, museums, residences, and for other public and private functions. ■

# Utilizing Georgia's Historic Schools as Schools

In 1953, the annual report of the Georgia Department of Education boasted a total of 3,113 schools. Today, there are approximately 2,003 in the state. Any existing schools dating from 1953 or earlier are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A structure must be at least 50 years old and look much as it did when it was constructed to be considered historic and listed in the National Register. Many educational facilities in use today are in buildings that are considered historic.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Georgia's population will increase by 1.5 million people in the next twenty years, which is equivalent to an increase of 75,000 additional Georgians each year. Rising population numbers will inevitably lead to increased enrollment in schools, with the consequent increased need for additional school buildings. However, existing historic school buildings should also be used to meet the growing need for educational facilities.

The rehabilitation of an existing school may be funded through the Georgia Department of Education's Capital Outlay Program. With the passage of House Bill 1187, the "A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000," Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated was amended relating to elementary, secondary and adult education. HB 1187 amended existing State Board of Education policies to allow the use of Capital Outlay Program funds in rehabilitating those schools that are considered "registered historic landmarks." Facilities are considered "registered historic landmarks" when they are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or the Georgia Register of Historic Places or when they are certified by the state historic preservation officer as eligible for such registration. In addition, the local board of education must use these schools for educational purposes, not, for instance, as the local board of education offices. The renovation must meet all of the normal building codes and educational program standards. The historic school must also have "an extended life comparable to that of a new facility," which means that it must last at least another 25 years.

Funds will be allocated for the rehabilitation of these landmark schools in "an amount which is lesser of the

cost of new construction to replace the historic landmark or the actual cost of such renovation and modernization." Currently, the state allows \$54 a square foot for new construction of an elementary school, \$56 a square foot for middle schools and \$58 a square foot for high schools. If by chance the rehabilitation costs exceed these amounts, the local school board is responsible for making up the difference.

**"Well-designed, well-built schools, with something of artistic grace and beauty manifest in structure and grounds, will have an influence for good, not only upon pupils, but upon the entire community. Preventable ugliness is a sin, especially when it is forced upon children in the formative years of their lives...Let us make the school what it should be—the most attractive place in the community."**

— M. L. Brittain, State School Superintendent, *School Architecture: Georgia* (Georgia's Department of Education, 1911)

In order for a school to actually receive Capital Outlay Program funding, the school's rehabilitation must be a top priority within the school board's Local Facilities Plan. Every school system must create a long-range Local Facilities Plan at least once every five years. This plan identifies all the needs for new and existing schools within that school system and

the estimated funds needed for new construction, as well as modifications to existing school buildings. The local school system then must prioritize each identified need.

Each year, local school systems earn entitlement to state dollars for capital projects based on those needs identified in their Local Facilities Plan. [Entitlement funds are earned by calculating the local system's needs relative to the total needs of all Georgia school systems.] Each year every school system must decide whether to submit an application requesting state funding for the construction projects that are



The **Booker T. Washington School**, Atlanta's first public high school built for African Americans, was opened in 1924. It was the only African American public high school in Atlanta until 1947. The school is still in use today.



identified as the next priority in the system's Local Facilities Plan or to allow its entitlement earnings to accrue that year. Funds that accrue for one year may be used in the following year(s).

Funding is also available for the rehabilitation of a school building that has previously been vacated, as long as it is listed as a priority within the local facilities plan and the building meets certain educational standards and building codes. The Department of Education sets the educational standards, such as minimum classroom square footage, corridor width, and number of restrooms. The International Building Codes is the applicable set of building codes enforced. The International Building Codes handbook, however, contains a section that addresses existing buildings and offers some compliance alternatives for these buildings. These codes should be used when rehabilitating historic buildings. It will be the financial responsibility of the local school board to make sure any vacant buildings meet necessary codes before funding is applied for and received through the Capital Outlay Program.

In addition, schools occupied prior to 1950 can earn up to \$20,000 per instructional unit (classroom) for renovation costs and may receive \$.50 per square foot for a major modification such as roof replacement or \$5 to \$7 a square foot for HVAC installation. Schools are only eligible to apply for this renovation money every 20 years. According to OCGA 20-2-260, "renovation" or "modernization" refers to construction projects that involve the replacement (or rehabilitation) of "major building components such as lighting, heating, air-conditioning, plumbing, roofing, electrical, electronic, or flooring systems; millwork; cabinet work and fixed equipment; energy retrofit packages; or room-size modifications within an existing facility, but excluding routine maintenance and repair items or operations."

Routine maintenance is paid for by the local board of



Atlanta's **Joseph E. Brown Middle School** was originally built in 1923 as a junior high school. Closed in 1992, it was reopened as a middle school after rehabilitation in the late 1990s.



The **Wynnton Elementary School** in Columbus was built in 1923 around the earlier 1843 Wynnton Academy, a one-room building that now is used as the elementary school's library.

education through its typical revenue source of local property taxes. The local board may also receive approximately \$240 per pupil through the state's Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding program for maintenance and operation.

The SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) program is an avenue through which most municipalities can raise the extra funding needed to complete rehabilitation projects. In November 1996, Georgia voters approved a constitutional amendment allowing local boards of education the option of calling for a referendum to ask their local voters to approve a one-percent SPLOST to pay for constructing new schools and rehabilitating existing ones. SPLOST is often combined with Capital Outlay funds to provide gap funding for projects. The rehabilitation of the 1925 Academy of Richmond County (SEE PHOTOS ON PAGES 1 AND 2) was paid for with SPLOST money.

The Georgia Department of Education projects the life expectancy of current new school construction to be 40 years, though there are 100 year-old schools in Georgia that have been maintained and still serve to educate the children of their respective communities. Prudently using both new and old buildings would not only benefit taxpayers, but would serve the needs of the state's growing student population for years to come. ■

**For more information about Georgia's Capital Outlay for Public School Facilities Construction, please contact the Facilities Services Unit of the Georgia Department of Education at 404-656-2454 or visit their Web site at [www.doe.k12.ga.us/schools/facilities/index.asp](http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/schools/facilities/index.asp).**

## Additional Resources

The **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities** (NCEF) is a free public service funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Their Web site at [www.edfacilities.org/rl/build\\_or\\_renovate.cfm](http://www.edfacilities.org/rl/build_or_renovate.cfm) provides a resource list of links, books, and journal articles on how education agencies decide whether to rehabilitate existing historic school buildings in need of repair or construct new facilities. This site is an excellent source for information on planning, designing, funding, building, improving, and maintaining historic schools.

## Case Study CHARLES ELLIS MONTESSORI SCHOOL, Savannah

Many historic schools across the United States continue to be used as schools by their respective communities. Below is a case study documenting the efforts of a group of parents who encouraged their local board of education to rehabilitate their existing school rather than demolish it to build a new facility. The rehabilitation ultimately saved local taxpayers approximately \$6.5 million.

“More bathrooms, ramps for the handicapped, an elevator, four new classrooms, a renovation of existing library, a new gymnasium, cafeteria and playground are all part of preliminary plans to expand the oldest functional school in Chatham County.” Writing in the *Savannah Morning News* in April 1999, Jennifer Rose Marino was referring



to the Charles Ellis Montessori Elementary School (LEFT) located on 48TH and 49TH Streets in the historic Ardsley Park neighborhood of Savannah. The

two-story, brick school building was constructed in 1929 and now houses Georgia’s only public Montessori school, the most successful magnet school in Chatham County.

In 1997, the Chatham County Board of Education planned to increase enrollment and construct a new school building. Concerned parents wanted the school to retain its current size and location. They organized and created Parent Advocates for Charles Ellis (PACE) to encourage the Board of Education to reconsider its plan to abandon the school.

According to an account of the proceedings, (\*):

“PACE looked for the 20 acres the school board required [to build the new school] in the historic district and determined it would mean tearing down approximately 100 African-American homes....

The school board eventually conceded and began to draw up plans for renovations and additions to the school. However, the new plans consisted of a 300-student enrollment increase and two new wings that would drastically reduce the play yard....

PACE countered with a plan that included keeping the Montessori curriculum and becoming a true magnet—or charter—school, removing a non-compatible, non-workable 1950s addition and adding only one large wing which could raise enrollment to 500 students. They were also able to creatively rework parent and bus loading zones to retain an adequate play yard.

The board accepted their plan, and just over a year from the initial announcement to close Charles Ellis, the school board appointed an architecture firm to finalize designs for the estimated \$4.3 million renovation and construction project. The price tag for the board’s initial new school came in at around \$11 million!”

Rehabilitation is now complete at this historic school. The new addition was built while school was in session and other work accomplished during summer break. Parents, students, teachers, neighborhood residents, and the local school board are pleased with the end result—a 21ST century educational facility housed in an early 20TH century neighborhood school. ■

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\*Jennifer Martin Lewis. “We become like that which we constantly admire: Justifying the use of historic school buildings as schools.” UGA thesis for Masters in Historic Preservation, 2002, on file at the School of Environmental Design at UGA.

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# Rehabilitate or Build New?

There are often heated debates when school districts are trying to decide whether to rehabilitate an existing facility or construct a new building. Those who favor new school construction often cite the inadequacies of existing or historic schools. The following excerpts from the National Trust publication *Historic Schools: A Roadmap for Saving Your School* may be of assistance when arguing for the rehabilitation of historic school buildings:

They [those who are against historic school renovation] will likely begin with a litany of maintenance concerns. Certainly, older schools need maintenance, but point out that the older buildings have received only Band Aids in recent years and that a major renovation would renew the systems to last another 50-70 years with no more maintenance than new buildings require.

There is a common perception that new construction is maintenance free. While maintenance costs may diminish for a year or two after a major construction project (new or renovated), deferral of maintenance is how all buildings deteriorate. The more chronic the deferral, the more geometric the rate of deterioration.

Most new school buildings actually require more maintenance over time, since they lack the quality construction of an earlier era (plaster rather than wallboard, mortar rather than caulk, terrazzo rather than carpet). Also challenge the life expectancy of new construction. Will the new school last 25 or 50 years?

Another common argument is that the facility is too small, either in whole or in part. Point out that renovation often involves sensitive additions and that remodeling often reallocates existing space to meet today's needs. Individual classrooms that are too small can be used for the many small group functions now a part of school programming, or recon-

figured at minimal cost by moving non-bearing party walls.

Inadequate technology is often cited as a concern with older schools. Since older schools commonly have high ceilings and/or tunnel systems, routing communication cable throughout the building is not difficult, and costs no more than new construction.

A leaky [building exterior] is another commonly cited deficiency warranting replacement. Leaks almost always relate to roofing and windows. Both are chronic when maintenance has been spotty or of poor quality. A substantial renovation will address these matters with new roofs, and often new windows at a quality level at least comparable to new construction. And ask if the maintenance staff has ever had a chronic roof leak on a new building. It is all too common.

Safety is another major area of deficiency commonly used to discredit historic schools. Agree that compliance with critical life safety issues is important and that only detailed analysis can test the feasibility of remodeling to meet safety concerns. Safety arguments against renovating an historic school are often made in an overly dramatic way to create a scare effect. Below are some examples:

- Structural integrity is often questioned and stories told of a gymnasium roof collapse in some other community. Getting professional engineers to attest to the soundness of any existing structural element can be difficult in today's litigious world, and even their qualifying statements on perfectly sound buildings can cast aspersions. If the integrity of structural elements is impugned, demand the elements be exposed with selective demolition and fully evaluated in situ.

- Code violations are often cited as endangering student safety. Remember that there are different codes for existing buildings and new construction and that the critical element of any code is the life safety section (National Fire

**Myth:** It costs more to renovate a historic school than to build a new one.

**Fact:** Renovation often saves money compared to the cost of building a new school. The cost per square foot for new construction should also factor:

1. costs of new site acquisition and preparation;
2. old site demolition and disposal of construction waste or stabilization [demolition costs are usually four to five percent of the overall replacement costs];
3. the cost of creating a new infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.) at the new site; and
4. the cost of transporting the children to the new site once the school is completed.



The **Montezuma High School**, designed by Atlanta architect William J.J. Chase, was constructed in 1921. The building was later used as the Macon County Elementary School but was demolished in 1999.



Protection Association IOI). Other sections of the building code are prescriptive based on current construction technology so evaluators can often find numerous technical violations. Focus on the real threat to safety and the “spirit” or intent of the code rather than its miniscule details [and work with code officials to implement acceptable compliance alternatives].

■ Lead paint poses a threat if consumed or inhaled by children. Options include complete abatement or containment where it is exposed to such intake. These treatments are not exotic or particularly difficult. They can add some expense that must be factored into the cost equation, but beware the tendency to overly dramatize the risk and the cost.

■ Asbestos must have already been documented and abated or contained with a regular documented inspection management plan under the AHERA (Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act) law applying to all school facilities. Still, its

**Values inherent in some older schools that are not available in new construction:**

- Large and handsome windows, a common feature of older schools rarely available today
- Decorative woodwork and tile
- Terrazzo or wood floors (available but rarely afforded in new schools today)
- High ceilings and grand spaces
- Artwork in the form of murals or other special features

presence can frighten parents and teachers. Shortly after the passage of AHERA in the 1980s, when all school districts suddenly needed to address asbestos abatement to be in compliance, the small industry

that did such work was overwhelmed and costs skyrocketed. Today, the field is competitive and the costs reasonable. It is now a routine aspect of building renovation.

Secure and offer technical assistance from pro bono design professionals sympathetic to and experienced in preservation to offset the bias often found in school architects and construction managers with a vested interest in new construction.

The other common argument for replacement is that renovating a building in use is disruptive to education. Point out that schools can often be renovated in phases over the summer and that watching the process of renovation can also be an educational experience for students.

There is often an abiding skepticism of the feasibility of renovation and an assumption of inflexibility of older facilities. This is born of limited truth but each building is unique, and as preservationists know, older buildings are usually far more flexible than is commonly understood.



Designed by Columbus architect T.W. Smith, the **Valdosta High School** was constructed in 1905. The structure functioned as a school until its demolition in the mid-1970s.

Use success stories as case studies to illustrate how older schools can meet 21st century educational needs at reasonable costs and show illustrations of those schools to help... [everyone involved] see the potential of their older schools.

But it is still true that some schools can be feasibly renovated and others not. Argue that an objective analysis by an experienced design professional is the only way to test the feasibility of renovation, and indicate your preparedness to accept such a study. A feasibility study of the issues involved in renovation is the only tested way to evaluate the fit of an old building to contemporary educational uses (see the National Trust’s publication, *Historic Schools: Renovation vs. Replacement & the Role of a Feasibility Study*).

It is critical this study be executed with great objectivity and fairness, and given the prejudices within the construction industry for new construction, select a design team with experience in renovating historic schools. ■

**To read the entire publication and related studies, please visit the National Trust’s web site at [www.nationaltrust.org/issues/historic\\_schools.html](http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/historic_schools.html). Reprinted with permission, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036, 202-588-6053, [www.nationaltrust.org](http://www.nationaltrust.org).**

## Additional Resources

The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** (NTHP) has posted 30 historic neighborhood school success stories to the “Issues and Initiatives” section of its Web site at [www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/studies\\_intro.html](http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/studies_intro.html). Each case study describes the school’s history, rehabilitation, and present use, along with reasonable solutions to: building code compliance, structural problems, deferred maintenance, mechanical-HVAC upgrades, safety issues, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, adaptation to modern educational programmatic needs, and sympathetic additions to historic structures.

# Deferred Maintenance: The #1 problem facing historic schools

Not every older school building can, realistically, be kept in continued use—but many can and should be! School officials will not be able to make decisions wisely until they can look past assumptions that “old” means flawed or substandard, and instead make informed decisions based on the merits and condition of each building.

Even relatively new schools that do not receive the regular maintenance they need—from painting and patching to periodic upgrading of materials and systems—will age in a hurry. Of course, the longer these tasks have been neglected, the more costly the repairs. Poor quality additions or improvements also lead to the perception that the original building has unfixable flaws.

Why do school districts fail to keep their older buildings in good repair? Not surprisingly, it all comes down to money. Year after year, school districts divert money from maintenance to pay for other pressing needs—books and supplies; computers and special equipment; teacher’s salaries, etc. Particularly when there is an anti-tax sentiment among policy makers and voters, school districts have no choice but to find ways to keep their spending down—so building maintenance gets postponed.

Furthermore, some state and local policies actually work to encourage this neglect. The policy of New York, described in a 1998 report by the state

comptroller, is typical of many states: “There is a built-in fiscal incentive for school districts to avoid prudent maintenance expenditures, and instead

let physical structures deteriorate until replacement is the only real option. State aid reimbursement is provided explicitly for capital expenditures at a generous rate, whereas it is not for routine maintenance.”

Yet when older schools are properly maintained and upgraded as needed, they can continue to serve their communities well. When school districts take proper care of their building stock, it

demonstrates that they are making wise use of public money and providing good stewardship of the public’s resources. ■

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**Assumption:** “Old” means out of date, or even obsolete.

**Reality:** It’s not age that undermines an older school building—it’s lack of care.

**According to the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, about 14.1 percent of the operating budgets of local school districts was devoted to maintenance in 1920 but only about four percent by 1990.**

## Georgia’s Historic Schools in the National Register of Historic Places

Over the years, school buildings in Georgia have changed from the small, one-room wooden schoolhouses that proliferated across the rural landscape, to the larger, one and two-story brick structures that were built in towns and cities in the 1920s, to the even larger, rambling campuses built in the 1960s after desegregation. Approximately 120 of these Georgia schools are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including Columbus’ circa 1843 Wynnnton Academy (*photo on page 4*), which is still used as a public school. (The National Register of Historic Places is our country’s official list of historic buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts worthy of preservation.)

An exciting project currently taking place in Georgia will help to document the developmental history and evolution of all these schools. A statewide study is underway to identify the architectural styles and types of historic school buildings as well as provide an overview of the connection between educational philosophy in Georgia and the physical facilities in which students were taught. This information will be prepared on a National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) for Georgia’s historic public schools. The MPDF will simplify the process of nominating individual school buildings to the National Register and will encourage the recognition of the significance of our state’s historic schools. The project is scheduled for completion in the fall of 2004.

**For more information about nominating a historic school in your community to the National Register of Historic Places, please contact HPD’s National Register coordinator at 404-651-6782.**



# Adaptive Use: A New Life for Vacant Schools

While it is most desirable to maintain school buildings as schools, unfortunately, there are circumstances under which these historic buildings are abandoned. However, if buildings are in good condition, they can continue to serve their communities in a variety of ways. Common forms of adaptive use include educational, community, residential, office, and commercial uses.

## OTHER EDUCATIONAL USES

The preferred adaptive reuse for school buildings is their retention as instructional facilities. The use of school buildings for these types of uses will require the fewest modifications, thus costing less and resulting in fewer alterations to the building's historic fabric. Middle and elementary schools can easily convert to magnet, charter or preschools, while high schools have often been converted to middle schools. The local boards of education could move into a vacant school, using classrooms for administrative offices space, curriculum resource centers, or teacher training/workshops. Each of these uses maintains the building, while maintaining an educational presence in the community.

### Other educational uses include:

- Charter schools
- College continuing education or satellite classrooms
- Administrative offices
- Preschools
- Day care centers
- Headstart centers
- After-school enrichment programs



The 1926 **William Robinson School** in the Summerville Historic District of Augusta has been used by the Richmond County Board of Education for its curriculum center since the 1980s.



**Massie School**, which served the city of Savannah as an elementary school from its opening in 1856 to its closing in 1974, continues to serve the city as the Massie Heritage Interpretation Center, a unit of the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools. Located in Savannah's National Historic Landmark District, Massie School is now a museum and resource center for heritage education, especially as it relates to the city's history and environment. Massie offers its visitors a chance to relive a day in the life of their ancestors in the center's authentic 19th-century classroom. The center also features a multicultural resource library as well as a heritage and history archive and library.

## COMMUNITY USES

Historic school buildings are often converted to provide community services. Examples include adaptive use as office space for local nonprofit organizations or federal, state, county, and municipal governmental agencies. Many schools in Georgia have been converted into community cultural centers containing libraries, local history museums, art galleries, and performing arts groups. Churches could easily adapt a school building to their needs, as classrooms could convert to Sunday school rooms, the auditorium to the sanctuary, and the cafeteria to the fellowship hall.

### Community uses include:

- Offices for non-profit organizations or governmental agencies
- Cultural arts centers
- Conference centers
- Performing arts centers
- Museums/Galleries
- Libraries



**Madison Graded School:** This spectacular 1895 Romanesque Revival school located on Main Street in Madison served as a public school until 1957. In the 1970s, the school was converted to the Madison-Morgan Cultural Center and contains a regional history museum, a restored early 20th century classroom and four art galleries with changing exhibits. The school's original 397-seat auditorium, whose original woodwork, seats and chandelier have all been restored, now offers space for theatre, dance, and musical productions, including the Center's annual Children's Theatre Festival and Chamber Music Festival.



**Cochran Municipal Building and Grammar School:** These two historic buildings have both served the students and citizens of the city of Cochran since their construction. The circa 1928 Municipal Building originally contained the city hall, municipal auditorium, and four classrooms for the nearby high school. Today, the building is home to the local Chamber of Commerce, Cochran-Bleckley Arts Alliance, and a social services agency, while the auditorium, which was completely restored in 1991, is used by the entire community for cultural programs. The circa 1942 grammar school building is used by the Cochran Police Department and Magistrate Court.

The **Leila Ellis Grammar School**, built in 1937 and located on Lee Street in downtown Valdosta, was converted into a public health facility and community service center in



2003. The HIV/AIDS clinic provides health services to low-income county residents. Lowndes County put together several funding sources to make this project a reality. In addition to the county's contribution of \$100,000 in Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds, the county received a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), along with \$473,000 in Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA) funds.



Grantville's **Thomas Glanton School** was built in 1936 in the Neoclassical style. The structure, located on LaGrange Street, served Grantville as a school until the 1980s. After closing the school,

the city decided to rehabilitate the building to consolidate city services into one location. The 12,210 square foot facility now houses the city hall, police department, and city library, with the Grantville Senior Center housed in a 1954 annex to the historic school.

## RESIDENTIAL/OFFICE/COMMERCIAL USES

Conversion of a school into residential units is an option, including apartments, condominiums, lofts, and assisted living centers for the elderly or persons with disabilities. Many schools have been modified into retail/commercial uses, such as farmer's markets, restaurants, antique malls or as office space. Finally, schools may also provide mixed-use space, containing commercial ventures, along with housing units for employees.

### Residential/Office/Commercial uses include:

- Public or private housing such as apartments or condominiums
- Elderly housing or assisted living centers
- Private offices
- Mixed-used commercial development

**Roosevelt High School**, located on Rosalia Street in the Grant Park neighborhood of Atlanta, originally opened in 1925 as the city's female high school. The 136,350 square foot structure was converted into 92 apartments in the late 1980s. The developer took advantage of the federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit Program (RITC) to help fund the project. Administered in Georgia through the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Department of Natural Resources, the RITC offers a federal income tax credit equal to 20 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenses. For more information about historic preservation tax incentive programs, please contact HPD's Tax Incentives coordinator at 404-651-5566.



The 1930 Colonial Revival **West Point Public School** served as an educational facility until its closing in 1986. In 1995, the city announced plans to demolish the building; however, concerned citizens organized as Our Town, Inc., a non-profit group committed to the preservation and restoration of the school. In 1999, the group received a \$15,000 Georgia Heritage grant from HPD to complete detailed exterior rehabilitation plans. In 2001, Our Town, Inc. partnered with a private developer to rehabilitate the building into 22 elderly housing units (18 one-bedroom and four two-bedroom). The auditorium will also be restored for use as a public performance facility. The partnership plans to use federal and state preservation tax incentives to assist with the project.

## Historic Rosenwald Schools in Georgia

In 2001, the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources joined an initiative by the National Trust for Historic Preservation to identify and document some of Georgia's most endangered historic educational resources, the Rosenwald schools. Jeanne Cyriaque, HPD's African American programs coordinator, has spearheaded this effort. The Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network (GAAHPN) and the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation are also supporters of this important project.

During early 20TH century segregation, Sears Roebuck & Company CEO Julius Rosenwald established a matching fund to encourage the construction of schools for African American children in rural southern communities. In all, approximately 5,300 Rosenwald schools were constructed in 15 southern states from 1913 through the 1930s. Most were abandoned in the 1960s following integration. Of the 261 buildings constructed for 242 schools in Georgia between 1915-1937, only 31 are known to remain. The disappearance of the Rosenwald schools has fueled

enough interest to merit a listing on the National Trust's 2002 list of the "11 Most Endangered Historic Places."



The **Noble Hill** school was constructed in 1923 and was the first school in northwest Georgia to be constructed with Rosenwald funds. Following its restoration in 1983, it now functions as a history museum and cultural center.

The future for the remaining Rosenwald schools in Georgia is fairly positive. Attention from the "Most Endangered" listing and subsequent research has increased community awareness of the schools and the importance of their preservation. Today, about half of Georgia's existing Rosenwald schools are vacant, but the other half are being used by local communities. The most popular adaptive reuse for these buildings is as a community center, but others are being used as daycare centers, church classrooms, and museums. Additionally, the Rosenwald School Initiative project of the National Trust is currently seeking

dedicated rehabilitation funding to restore remaining Rosenwald schools. ■

**For more information about identifying and preserving your community's Rosenwald School, please contact HPD's African American programs coordinator at 404-656-4768 or visit [www.rosenwaldschools.com](http://www.rosenwaldschools.com).**

# Historic Rural Schools Initiative

The Historic Rural Schools Initiative was created and developed by Andrea Gerhart MacDonald, historic preservation planner for the South Georgia Regional Development Center (SGRDC). From the start of her tenure there in July 2001, Ms. MacDonald recognized the potential role that the region's historic schools could play in community-based revitalization efforts. "During the first few months as I traveled the region and learned my way around



The **Ocilla Public School's** 700-seat auditorium will be restored and promoted as a local and regional performance venue.

our communities, I saw that every city, county, and nearly every dirt road had a vacant or underutilized school building. Some were modest wood structures, and others were more complex brick structures, but all truly represented the pride of the people who built them."

Over the next few months, Ms. MacDonald began developing her ideas for the Initiative. Working with the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Department of Natural Resources, she developed a field survey form and database to document historic school buildings and their representative sites. Interns began survey work in April 2002. In total, 91 historic school buildings (approximately 50 years or older) were surveyed in the nine-county SGRDC region.

The first community in the region to embrace the project was the city of Ocilla in Irwin County. Ocilla has a centrally located historic school building from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) era that had been vacant since 1987. Completed in 1936, the Ocilla Public School housed both elementary and high school students. Later, a new high school was constructed and the building was converted into the

Ocilla Elementary School and served the community until the late 1980s.

Approximately 50 community members attended a public meeting in Ocilla in June 2002. Participants shared fond memories of the school and its importance in their lives. Led by Ms. MacDonald, the meeting focused on

ideas for reusing the Ocilla Public School building and possible funding sources for its rehabilitation. To date, the project has received a \$10,000 Georgia Heritage grant from HPD to produce a rehabilitation plan for the school along with construction documents and a \$20,000 Local Development Fund Grant from the Department of Community Affairs to repair the metal roof and all 120 wooden windows.

Other projects currently involved in the Historic Rural Schools Initiative include the former Hahira High School in Lowndes County, Eureka School in Turner County, and the Oaklawn Academy Auditorium in Lanier County. ■

**The Historic Rural Schools Initiative is a model for other communities or regions that wish to document and preserve their historic school buildings. For more information, please contact Andrea Gerhart MacDonald at 229-333-5277.**

## Goals of the Historic Rural Schools Initiative:

1. Determine new uses for vacant historic school buildings that will accomplish identified community needs.
2. Achieve greater awareness of historic resources within the region.
3. Provide planning and technical assistance to accomplish reuse of vacant or underutilized historic school buildings (SGRDC's role).
4. Assist in the rehabilitation and reuse of at least one historic school in each county.



Exterior of the circa 1936 **Ocilla Public School**.