

Women's Association for the Betterment of Public Schoolhouses ^[1]

Women's Association for the Betterment of Public Schoolhouses

by Tom Belton, 2006

See also: [Rosenwald Fund](#) ^[2].

Interest in education and child welfare were major themes for women reformers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North Carolina. In a speech to students in 1902 at the North Carolina Normal and Industrial College for Women at Greensboro (now the [University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#) ^[3]), [Charles D. McIver](#) ^[4] exhorted students to labor as mothers and teachers to improve public education for white children in North Carolina. His speech planted the seeds for the formation of the Women's Association for the Betterment of Public Schoolhouses in North Carolina (WABPS). Although originally founded as a student organization, the group saw its membership skyrocket with the enrollment of middle class white women.

The WABPS served as a major vehicle for women reformers in North Carolina who hoped the organization could combat both illiteracy and poverty within the state. Between 1902 and 1910, the association constructed hundreds of schoolhouses. The widespread popularity of the program was at least partially due to the building of schools at the local level. Because of its success, other states launched similar programs with North Carolina as a model. Like other social programs in this period, the WABPS focused only on whites. In a somewhat parallel program, African American women supported the growth of black schoolhouses in rural communities through the [Rosenwald Fund](#) ^[2]. Through contributions raised at picnics, ice cream socials, and rallies they matched school building funds provided through the Rosenwald program. By the early 1930s, North Carolina had constructed more Rosenwald schools than any other southern state. While both the WABPS and the Rosenwald Fund increased the number and conditions of school buildings, they were largely unsuccessful in their efforts to eradicate poverty.

References:

Thomas E. Hatchett, "The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina," *NCHR* 65 (October 1988).

James L. Leloudis II, "School Reform in the New South: The Women's Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902-1919," *Journal of American History* 69 (March 1983).

Subjects:

[Women](#) ^[5]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Guilford County](#) ^[7]

[Greensboro](#) ^[8]

[University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#) ^[9]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[10]

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