

HAPPY 160th BIRTHDAY, JULIUS ROSENWALD!

One hundred and ten years ago today, Julius Rosenwald chose an unusual way to celebrate his fiftieth birthday, one that says a lot about the kind of man he was. On August 12, 1912, the *Chicago Record-Herald* announced that to mark his first half-century the president of Sears, Roebuck was making charitable donations totaling \$687,500 – an amount equivalent to \$17 million in today’s dollars. The paper ran a cartoon showing Rosenwald holding a bag of money next to a sign with a slogan that had been invented for the occasion – “Give while you live.”

The recipients of these generous contributions were varied. There were two major gifts -- \$250,000 went to the Associated Jewish Charities, of whose board he was president, for a new Central Administration Building. A second gift of \$250,000 went to the University of Chicago on whose board he also served. This was a matching grant and resulted in, among other things, a new building for the Geology and Geography Department.

Other gifts went to create a country retreat for urban social workers, a plan recommended by his good friend Jane Addams; for a gymnasium for the Chicago Hebrew Institute; to compete a new building for a Jewish orphanage in Chicago; a matching grant towards a new tuberculosis sanitarium; and \$12,500 for the Glenwood Manual Training School to enable them to add a farm to the boarding school for impoverished youth.

The final gift – of \$25,000 – went to establish a fund, to be administered by Booker T. Washington, to provide matching grants to small schools and colleges, “offshoots of Tuskegee,” for training African American teachers. It was from this gift that, at Washington’s suggestion, \$2,800 was put aside for

matching grants for the first six small schoolhouses in rural Alabama that led to the construction of 5,357 Rosenwald schools, teacher homes and shop buildings in 15 southern states between 1912 and 1932.

Peter Ascoli wrote the definitive biography of his grandfather, whom he called JR. “What distinguishes JR from Carnegie and Rockefeller,” Ascoli writes, “is his comparative youth, his lack of corporate ruthlessness or bullying, and the fact that he started donating large sums of money while he was still very active in business. Both Rockefeller and Carnegie gave away the vast bulk of their fortunes after they had retired. JR was far from retired, but already in 1912, philanthropy, rather than business, was becoming the true interest and passion of his life.”

Julius Rosenwald's approach to philanthropy was a reflection of the kind of person he was – collaborative rather than authoritarian, generous, genuinely modest. He declined the honor of having things named for him (Rosenwald Hall at the University of Chicago was a rare exception) yet insisted that his gifts not be anonymous. By attaching your name to your donations, he maintained, you show your community where you stand and what you value. On his 50th birthday one hundred and ten years ago Julius Rosenwald did just that.

Happy birthday JR!

By Stephanie Deutsch

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Dr. Dorothy Canter leads the Rosenwald Park Campaign effort to create the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Legislation was passed in late 2020 and signed into law in early January 2021 directing the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a special resource study of the sites associated with Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools. The NPS expects that the complete study and recommendations will be submitted to Congress in early 2024. The Campaign hopes that Congress will initiate the legislation to create the National Park with a visitor center in Chicago and a small number of Rosenwald schools shortly thereafter. This National Park would commemorate the legacy of Julius Rosenwald and tell a little known but key aspect of early 20th century American history. For more information visit: rosenwaldpark.org.