

**Russell Grove Association, Inc.**  
8701 Otterburn Road  
P.O. Box 213  
Amelia, Virginia 23002

## **Russell Grove Association, Inc.**

Presents

# **Learning from our rich history**

### **Premiere Exhibits**

*Trailblazer In Education:*

**Samantha Neil**

**&**

*Amelia History Maker:*

**Robert Russa Moton**

**Russell Grove Museum**  
8701 Otterburn Road, Suite 103

Room 1

## **THE EARLY YEARS 1864—1937**

### **TRAILBLAZER FOR EDUCATION OF NEGROES**

The church played a major role in helping to educate and provide schools for Negroes in Amelia County.

The Early Years exhibit revisits the schoolhouse chapel that preceded the Russell Grove building and documents its growth and the experiences of members of the early graduating class.

From the foundation of Samantha Neil's black Presbyterian church work, many schools and churches were founded. In most cases, the churches were organized and the schools grew out of them. Six were organized as a result of Mrs. Neil's work. They were Allen Memorial, Albright, Big Oak, Oak Grove, Mount Herman and Russell Grove.



Samantha Jane Neil



Russell Grove School

During the Civil War, Mrs. Neil, a white Presbyterian woman came to Amelia looking for the body of her Union Army officer husband, killed on a Virginia battlefield. Instead, she found her life's work as an educator and began ministering to Negroes and establishing churches in Amelia and Nottoway counties.



Big Oak



Chula

Other schools were established throughout Amelia County for black children. Information and photographs documenting many of these early schools, students and teachers are displayed.

ROOM 1 (CONTINUED)

Under a sprawling oak tree near Russell Grove Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Samantha Neil began teaching her first class of black students. She trained two assistants, Nuna Booker and Mrs. Crawley, from Amelia, to help her. Parents and patrons did much to provide education for their children. They would buy the land, construct the buildings and usually came up with a portion of the money needed for materials in the building

The early teachers worked under many difficulties. Transportation was poor. Teachers walked up to five miles to work and received low salaries, ranging from \$15 to \$50 dollars per month. Heating and lighting were crude and there was little or no communication during bad weather.

School started in October and ended in February. For nearly 20 years the curriculum centered around reading. In 1937, Russell Grove graduated its first class of 10 boys and 16 girls. Progress continued with a five-room home economics cottage, school accreditation, expanded curriculum, increased faculty and enrollment. Parents provided transportation. More land was purchased in the 40s, and modern expansions in the 50s included a library, a science lab, a teacher's lounge, and hallways with individual lockers. For years, these accomplishments continued to enrich the lives of the county's black families. In 1969, integration brought an end to the Russell Grove School legacy as the institution for educating black Amelians.

ROOM 2

THE GLORY DAYS OF RUSSELL GROVE 1950—1969

There are various artifacts, memorabilia and class and other photographs to help relive the rich history of Russell Grove.

Melvin W. Grimes started his career in Amelia as the Agricultural and Industrial Arts teacher. His Masters thesis provided research on the program's outcome.

Mr. Grimes later spent many years as high school principal with a distinct and stern voice. He shares stories of Russell Grove's struggles and "firsts" in an enlightening video interview. Several documents and photographs are displayed.



ROOM 3

AMELIA'S BLACK HISTORY MAKERS



This exhibit highlights local history makers who have made significant contributions to the growth of Amelia's African American community. This array of educators, entrepreneurs, political leaders and civil rights activists include Nellie A. Ramsey

Leslie, R.R. Moton, LeAndar Swann, Raymond Wilkinson, Henry Foster, Alexander Wingo, Jessie Bragg. Local teachers include Clara Archer, Geneva McGhee and Annette Perkinson.

ROOM 4

THE RUSSELL GROVE RESTORATION PROJECT



The newly renovated Russell Grove Building opened to alumni during the 2003 Reunion.

The Russell Grove Community Project was designed to renovate the Russell Grove School building and provide water and sewer services to the homes in the Russell Grove community. The county provided nearly \$314,935 of the \$1,792,270 Community Development Block Grant for renovation.

On June 25, 2001, Governor Jim Gilmore handed out an oversized check in the amount of \$900,000 to Philip Vannoorbeeck, county administrator and Russell Grove alumnus, Holcomb Thompson, during an official ceremony in South Hill, Virginia.



(l-r) County Administrator Philip Vannoorbeeck, District 5 Supervisor Frank Harris and Holcomb Thompson show off the check representing a \$900,000 Community Development Block Grant.

The doors of the Russell Grove building were re-opened in August 2003. The RGA continues its fundraising efforts to support the development of a museum and provide educational programs.

This exhibit shows the people and phases involved in development of this project. Its completion is a celebration of a rich legacy in academic excellence.



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The museum is open for special exhibits  
or by appointment

