

Russell Grove  
Association, Inc.

Presents

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**Learning  
from  
our  
rich  
history**

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Premiere Exhibit  
“The Two-Room Schools”

Russell Grove Museum  
8701 Otterburn Road, Suite 103

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

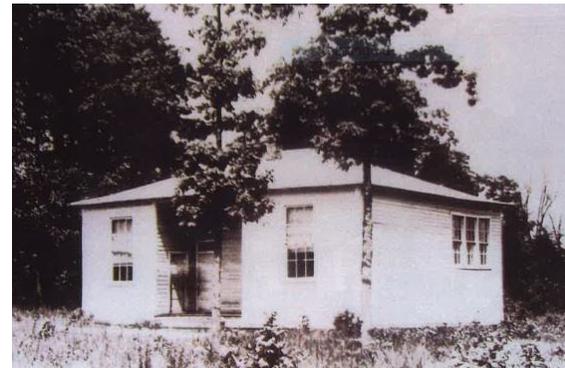
EXHIBIT 1

**THE TWO ROOM SCHOOL PROJECT**

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

During the Civil War, Samantha Jane Neil, a white Presbyterian woman came to Amelia looking for her lost Union Army officer husband 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.

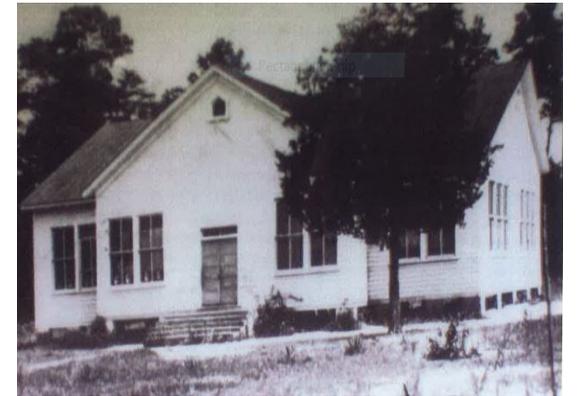
From this foundation of black Presbyterian church work, many schools and churches have been founded. In most cases, the churches were organized and the schools grew out of them. Six were organized as a result of Mrs. Neil's work. They were Allen Memorial, Albright, Big Oak, Oak Grove, Mount Herman and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



Big Oak

Many other schools were established throughout the neighborhoods of Amelia County for black children. Information documented in a

book called, “Early Schools in Amelia County” listed students and teachers known to have attended the schools. The photographs are old and blurry. If you have any photos and/or stories about attending these two-room schools, please be sure to share with the Museum staff. The project includes a short survey.



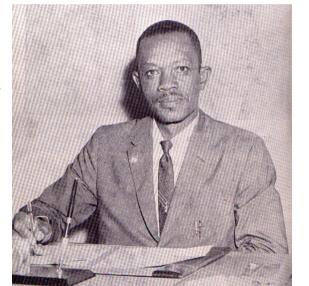
Chula

EXHIBIT 2

**THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK**

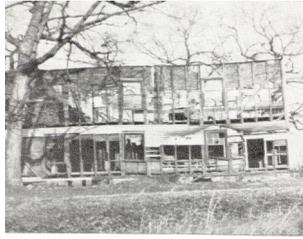
Melvin W. Grimes spent many years as chief administrator of the Russell

Grove Schools and shares stories of its struggles and “firsts” in an enlightening video interview, administrative documents and photographs.



### EXHIBIT 3

## THE EARLY YEARS



The Early Years exhibit revisits the two-story schoolhouse chapel that preceded the Russell Grove building and documents its growth and the experiences of members of the first and second graduating class. Various artifacts, memorabilia and photographs help relive the rich history of Russell Grove.



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

These 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 had little on no communication during bad weather.

School started in October and ended in February. For nearly 20 years the curriculum centered around reading. Russell Grove graduated its first class in 1937 consisting of 10 boys

and 16 girls. The progress continued with a five-room home economics cottage, school accreditation, expanded curriculum, increasing faculty and enrollment. Parents provided transportation at their own expense. More land was purchased in the 40s, and modern expansions in the 50s included a library, science labs, a teacher's lounge, hallways with individual lockers and more. For years, these accomplishments continued to enrich the lives of black families throughout the county. In 1969, integration brought an end to the Russell Grove School legacy as the institution for educating black Amelians. *For more on the history and growth of Russell Grove, see museum guides for a copy of the history.*

### EXHIBIT 4

## AMELIA'S BLACK HISTORY MAKERS



This exhibit highlights six 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, Raymond Wilkinson, Henry Foster, Alexander Wingo and Jesse Bragg.

### EXHIBIT 5

## 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.

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.

Early in 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.

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

### Thanks for Visiting

Let us know more about your experience today. Do you have any artifacts or memorabilia you wish to donate? Do you have exhibit ideas you want to share with us? Do you wish to support the museum with a monetary donation?

### Contact Us

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### Visit or Donate

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