

# Rocky Branch School Preservation Plan



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Prepared For:  
Rocky Branch Friends Group

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# Executive Summary

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The Rocky Branch School Preservation Plan creates a framework for preservation that will oversee a holistic rehabilitation of the schoolhouse. The Rocky Branch School was built in 1911 and served African-American students in the Sutherland region of Dinwiddie, Virginia until 1963. Located adjacent to the Rocky Branch Baptist Church, the schoolhouse has created tension amongst the congregation where some feel that demolition is the best option for the aging structure. This plan is prepared on behalf of the Friends Group of Rocky Branch School; an organization vested in pursuing all options for structural preservation.

Due to the substantial impact that African-American schools had in shaping southern community culture for the majority of the twentieth-century, there is an emphasis placed on preservation. As it stands, Rocky Branch School has suffered considerable damage from neglect and will require significant effort to restore the site. The school is included amongst the forty-one sites along the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail in South Central Virginia. Still, Rocky Branch suffers from a lack of funding and connectivity to the broader tourism industry and required the plan process to tailor its approach for long-term sustainability.

Research findings concluded that Rocky Branch School is primarily situated to capitalize on heritage tourism opportunities in the region. This conclusion was supported through the utilization of tools common to preservation planning that include structural analysis, identification of historic value, and efforts that support inclusion within the cultural identity of the larger region. Embedded in Rocky Branch is a wealth of history specific to Civil Rights during the 1920s. This translates into recommendations that aim to align the interests of Rocky Branch with the regional narrative of Civil Rights in Education Trail, in addition to connecting the local community with this tangible fixture of Sutherland's cultural past.

**This plan is presented as a platform from which all future preservation efforts can build from. Creating a baseline knowledge informs the client of present challenges, but also outlines available opportunities if preservation is fully pursued.**





**Client**

**Purpose**

**Approach**

# Section I

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The Rocky Branch School in Dinwiddie County, Virginia began serving students in the early twentieth century and continued to do so until the 1960s. A two-room frame construction schoolhouse, Rocky Branch was designed by and for the African-American population residing in the Sutherland community of Dinwiddie. Since the site's closure, as a school, the building has served primarily as an auxiliary building for the adjacent Rocky Branch Church. Originally constructed on the property of Ocran Methodist Church the schoolhouse was later moved two miles west to its current location off of Route 636. Many of the former students of Rocky Branch continue to live in the Dinwiddie area and are active members within the Rocky Branch Church.

Although included in the regional tour of the Civil Rights Educational Trail, Rocky Branch is worn down by time and offers little education or interaction for those visiting. In its entirety, the trail includes 41 sites in the south-central Virginia region and focuses on sites with connections to public education specific to African-Americans. Nearby Prince Edward County is home to the trail's primary site, the Robert Russa Moton Museum, which stands as center for education representing a decade's-worth of public school closures in response to Brown vs. the Board of Education.



Map 1: Dinwiddie, VA  
Family Search, 2015

# Section I.I

The Rocky Branch Preservation Plan is proposed to assist the Friends of the Rocky Branch School in their mission to save the schoolhouse structure of the same name. Their efforts were spurred by a divide amongst congregation members of the Rocky Branch Church of whether or not preservation of the schoolhouse is a worthwhile pursuit. One portion of the congregation believes that the site's blighted appearance tarnishes that of the church's and should face demolition as a result. However, due to the number of former Rocky Branch School students who now are members of the Rocky Branch Church, there is considerable resistance that opposes demolition.

Established under the guidance of the current pastor Lynn Robinson, the Friends Group is primarily comprised of former Rocky Branch students who have a vested interest in seeing the site retained and restored. Acting on behalf of the congregation, the Friends Group is focused on preserving this site in order to create an educational outlet that can serve as a valuable component on the regional Civil Rights Education Trail.



Image 2: Rocky Branch School in foreground. Rocky Branch Church behind  
Photo Credit: R. Tippett, 2015



Image 3: Civil Rights in Education Trail Logo  
VARetreat.com

Friends of the Rocky Branch School, in their effort to explore all options preservation related, are seeking a plan that incorporates architectural rehabilitation, heritage tourism, and community outreach. Essentially, the plan will create a framework that will ensure any preservation and education efforts taken now are sustainable in the long run, in order to ensure Rocky Branch's viability as historic fixture for Dinwiddie.

Sustainability is the means for which Rocky Branch will prosper long after the initial drafting of this plan. Structured in a way that identifies immediate actions and plans for future goals, the plan will offer a manageable approach for the Friends Group to move forward with confidence that preservation is realistic and feasible.

The Rocky Branch Preservation Plan is designed to allow Rocky Branch School to take an active role in the Civil Rights Education Trail and evolve into a site that accurately portrays this segment of regional Dinwiddie history. Incorporating Rocky Branch into the larger regional narrative of twentieth century African-American education is crucial, considering the extensive challenges presented to students, especially following the ruling in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* and the history that can be learned from that time period.

# Section I.II

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Even though this is a site-specific preservation plan, the aspect of community engagement still remains a valuable piece in the plan process. Since this site has varied meaning to so many people, it is important to bring that to the forefront.

Documentation of all content related to the school is of most importance to this point as moving forward demolition may prove a reality. The tangibility of site-specific research and documentation will allow the site to live on, even if its actual presence no longer remains. Still, preservation of the schoolhouse will remain the focus in an effort to persuade those in opposition of the value that such a unique site has to the community.



Image 4: Civil Rights in Education Trail Signage  
Photo Credit: R.Tippett, 2015

## Section I.III

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Evaluation of the Rocky Branch School was segmented into three distinct parts in order to formulate a framework for long range and sustainable implementation. Section I condenses client need and establishes expectations for how the plan will address existing concerns. Section II is comprised of research specific to Rocky Branch School that relies on historical context, architectural analysis, and connection to regional tourism. Compilation of this section was supported through archival research, site analysis and documentation, and review of similar historic schoolhouses along the Civil Rights in Education Trail and outside of it. Section III synthesizes the needs of the Rocky Branch community with insight obtained from research in order to formulate a series of goals and actions that directly correlate to the vision for Rocky Branch School.

## Methods & Approach

The Rocky Branch Preservation Plan aims to capture the school's historical significance within Civil Right's education and Dinwiddie history through a multi-faceted approach. This plan designates that responsibility through the use of the National Register of Historic Places site nomination, a phase one of a historic structures report, a site specific education plan, as well as creating connectivity with the regional historic identity. Incorporating these elements will help the site regain legitimacy as a resource for historical African-American education in southern Virginia. Supplementing this process is the first-hand accounts and testimonials of students who attended Rocky Branch as part of their primary education.

# Section I.III

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## Site Specific Heritage Tourism

Documenting the history of southern schoolhouses and their place within the larger regional identity. Including refined signage and site interaction through technology to attract tourists seeking out a modernized heritage tourism experience.

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## Phase I Historic Structures Report

Deliverables from this project segment will include: prioritization and status of building issues both interior and exterior; available construction and repair records, photographic and hand drawn documentation; as well as recommendations and budgets for proposed repairs.

## National Register Nomination

Placement on the National Register offers funding opportunities on a national level by recognizing the schoolhouse as a part of the country's historical landscape.

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## Connectivity to Regional History

Creating relationships with area and state museums who have a focus on the African-American educational experience will not only help the Friends Group continue with their efforts through a source of knowledgeable guidance but will also build awareness of Rocky Branch as historic destination. The Moton Museum, due to its proximity and educational focus, will serve as the primary connection to help steer Rocky Branch's growth.

## Section I.IV

## Roadmap to the Document



Image 1:  
Rocky Branch  
School circa  
1930  
VSU Johnston  
Memorial



# Section I.IV

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**The following sections include:  
Research & Analysis and Plan Recommendations**

## **Research & Analysis**

Evaluates historical, architectural, and regional attributes of the Rocky Branch School.

*Preservation*

*Rehabilitation*

*Education*

## **Plan Recommendations**

Step by step approach for implementation

*Goals*

*Objectives*

*Actions*



**Preservation**

**Rehabilitation**

**Education**

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To fully understand the role preservation takes in resurrecting historical buildings and sites, it is important to acknowledge the broader patterns of social and cultural history inherent to them. Interpreting that larger context into a tangible representation of life is the element of preservation that makes it relatable and valuable. Extending historic identity beyond those structures whose existences are defined by notable events and people and onto the everyday, will enable a more conceptualized representation of how life truly was. Everyday sites and the integral part they have in shaping opinion is most applicable to those pieces of history that are in naturally complex and often hard to come to terms with. Labeled as “sites of conscious,” these places are representative of a time and place where the narrative differs greatly from our current perception and beliefs (Gibson, 2015).

For American history, the presence of this tension is often embodied by the African-American experience. The dominance and pervasiveness that the Civil Rights Movement on the conscious twentieth century America is something that has continued to endure. Preserving sites that capture the story of Civil Rights through a unique and localized viewpoint is what will help maintain that discussion around historical issues and injustices in order for us to better understand the weight they carry in our own dialogue. School segregation in Virginia was not an atypical Southern experience for the majority of twentieth century and the retention of schoolhouses like Rocky Branch are reminders of an era of inequality but more importantly resilience. “Preserving them is not so much about the past as it is rebuilding for the present and the future – a future informed by the lessons of the past” (Harding, 2001, p. 25).

# Section II.I

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*“Preserving them is not so much about the past as it is rebuilding for the present and the future – a future informed by the lessons of the past.”*

-Kathleen Kilpatrick, Department of Historic Resources

The small one-to-two room African-American schoolhouses present throughout Southern Virginia are most often representations of the communities that surrounded them. In a time where racist mindsets prevailed throughout all levels of government, schools that served African-American students were often well underfunded in contrast to their white counterparts (Virginia Historical Society, 2015). This left African-American communities in the position to build, staff, and maintain their own schools in order to make available for any form of structured education. Most schools were overcrowded, lacked basic amenities, and offered little compensation for teachers. The disparity between the facilities for African-Americans and whites is a rallying point often cited in the argument for separate and equal.



VSU Johnston  
Memorial  
Library

Image 5:  
Dinwiddie  
Oct. 23



VSU Johnston  
Memorial  
Library

Image 6: Picture 6

# Section II.I

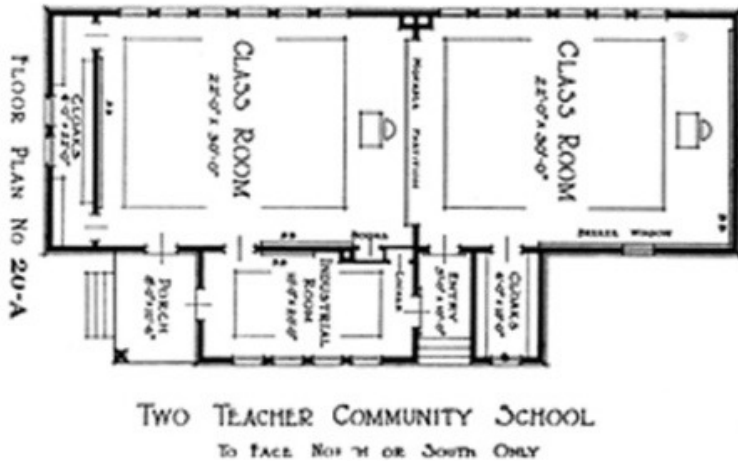
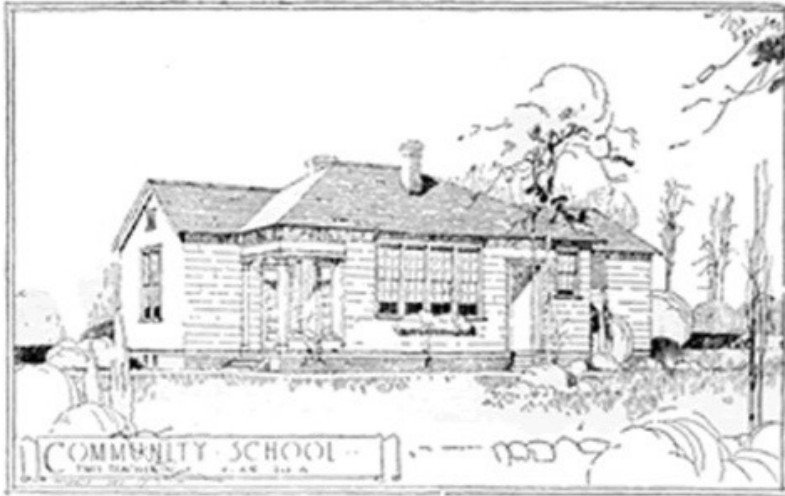


Image 7: One example of a Rosenwald School layout  
NRHP, Rosenwald Schools in VA

## ROSENWALD SCHOOLS

*An exception to the community funded schools were the Rosenwald Schools that were funded by the wealthy Sears executive, Julius Rosenwald (Klugh, 2005, p. 246). His funding helped to construct over 5,000 schools across 15 states between 1917 and 1932. The presence of these schools was so prevalent that 79 of Virginia's 95 counties had at least one Rosenwald School (MacQueen, 2010). Between 1917 and 1929, Rosenwald helped to fund five separate schools in Dinwiddie County (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2015).*

## Section II.I

## Other Dinwiddie Schoolhouses



Image 8: Center Star



Image 9: Old Olive Branch School



Image 10: Center Star

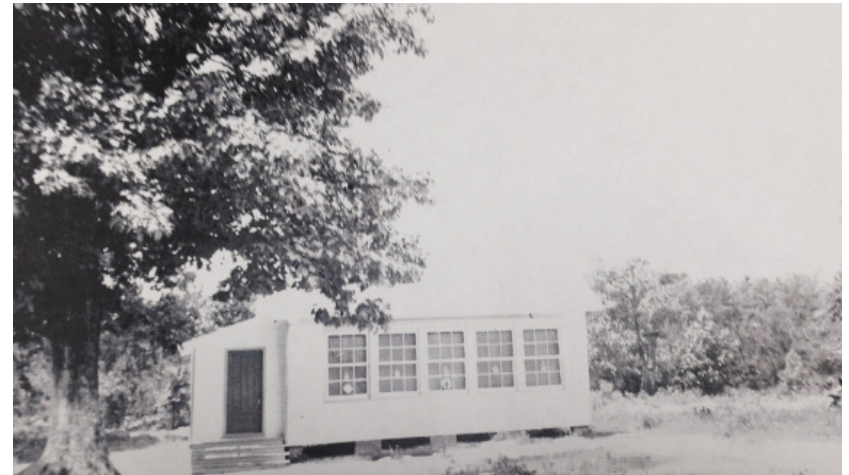


Image 11: Picture 41

## Section II.I

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One of the most remarkable aspects of these self-funded schoolhouses is that their proliferation was a testament to “cultural capital” held within the community (Savage, 2002, p. 8). Especially in rural African-American communities, there was a total reliance on this concept of cultural capital in order for collective group to satisfy their own political and economic needs in the Jim Crow South. This self-determination was a result of policy, specific to the rural south, that severely hindered the availability of African-American schoolhouses due to sheer number of youths who worked in the agriculture industry during the early part of the twentieth century. When the number of school age youths working in the agricultural industry plummeted during what is known as the “second crusade to establish common schools,” white southerners amended to the idea of universal education in an effort to retain their labor force. (Anderson, 1988, pp. 149-154).

By the time school integration was in full force by the 1960s, the era of community supported schoolhouses came to an end. The majority of African-American schools were shuttered with their teachers laid off and students bused off to the white schools (Dempsey, 1993, p.159). The most significant loss from this period, however, was the deeply woven relationship held between the community and its school. This connectivity is best described as, “Identity was more than just a sense of oneself; it defined one as a part of a larger cultural and historical movement (Dempsey, p.60). Today, each of these schools stands as a monument to the community that surrounds them. During a time true adversity, these schools symbolized the ability to not only overcome but to succeed.

## Section II.I

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Currently, many of these historic schoolhouses are at high risk of demolition or deterioration. Identifying these schools and the connection to the community both present and past is necessary to combat these aversive effects. Part of that process is involving these properties in state and national programs designed for places of historic significance.

Rocky Branch School, with its part in shaping the cultural identity of Dinwiddie and African-American education, makes it eligible candidate for the National Register of Historic Places. Established under the National Park Service, the National Register program recognizes sites, buildings, and districts for their historical significance. That worth is defined through association to events or people, cultural relevance, architectural style, and archaeological merit.

Inclusion in the National Register raises the status of a property, as it becomes a nationally recognized piece of American history. For properties like Rocky Branch School, this solidifies their place in history as accurately representing a pivotal point in the human experience. Additional benefits associated with the National Register include financial incentives in the form of rehabilitation tax credits and federal grants (National Park Service, 2015).

*This plan provides the nomination, which is reviewed by Virginia's State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) located in Richmond, Virginia.*



Image 12: NPS Logo  
NPS.com



## Section II.II

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## Rehabilitation

Structural rehabilitation for Rocky Branch School is necessary step in making the building a viable property. Currently, the relatively poor condition of the structure is due to years of neglect and underuse, since the site ceased to function as a school sixty years ago. As an extension of the National Register process, architectural rehabilitation is an important component that allows for education, community engagement, and encourages opportunities to fully take shape. Section II.II details a structural evaluation of Rocky Branch School that includes an existing conditions analysis and rank of issues by their severity. The phased approach to rehabilitation is designed to make the process more manageable for the Friends Group of Rocky Branch School, who is entrusted with sustaining the effort in the long term.

Formatting for this segment is based on a Historic Structures Report (HSR), which in itself, is broken into two distinct phases. Similar to the National Register, the National Park Service established guidelines that provide a framework for scaling work as well as outlining requirements for compiling a comprehensive report. For purposes of this plan, only phase I of the HSR will be utilized as phase II deals directly with implementation. The first phase of the HSR essentially evaluates structural integrity, identifies historical significance, and establishes a budget with corresponding timeline for any recommendations (Slaton, 2015). Included in the budgeting portion, is the designation for available sources of financial support in the current absence of funding for any efforts directed towards the schoolhouse.

## Section II.II

## Structural Evaluation

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Initial evaluation from one of the only known historic images of Rocky Branch (circa 1930-1935, below) reveals several slight changes from photographs taken in 2015 (page 27). Notably, the four-sided cupola along the roofline of the left side portion of the structure, is no longer present. The front staircase that led into the right side of the schoolhouse extended across the entire expanse of the porch in the 1930s. Today, the concrete staircase is narrowed to accommodate a smaller opening for entry along the porch. Railings on the porch have also since been added with the downsizing of the front staircase.

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Otherwise, Rocky Branch has remained relatively intact in the eighty years since the first photograph was taken. The number of window bays discernable in the historical image on the north, south, and western fronts of the schoolhouse is equivalent to the amount currently present. Both chimney stacks located are accounted for in both photographs as well as the foundational stone supports.



Image 13: Rocky Branch School circa 1930  
VSU Johnston Memorial Library

# Section II.II

Detailed observations of Rocky Branch provided for building measurements and classification of structural issues (additional information available in Appendix A). Analysis was broken into four parts, one for each exterior side of the school: front (west), back (east), right side (south), and left side (north).



Image 14



Image 15



Image 16



Image 17

Page Photo Credit: R. Tippett, 2015



AutoCAD Drawing 1: West  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

# Section

<b>Rocky Branch School Rehabilitation Outline Exterior: Front Façade (West)</b>			
<b>Index</b>	<b>Building Location</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat Level</b>
1	Weatherboard	loose pieces, peeling paint, mold along left side base, missing pieces	Minimal
2	Roof	rusting, not fully secured to building	Minimal
3	Porch Flooring	Not secured down in small areas	Minimal
4	Chimney	missing bricks	Minimal
5	Left Side Door	top of framing missing, rotting on bottom of frame	Moderate

Chart 1: West  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

# Section II.II

# East



AutoCAD Drawing 2: East  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

## Section II.II

---

<b>Rocky Branch School Rehabilitation Outline Exterior: Back Façade (East)</b>			
<b>Index</b>	<b>Building Location</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat Level</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Weatherboard</b>	loose pieces, peeling paint, missing pieces, hole on upper left hand side	<b>Minimal</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Windows</b>	missing sixth bay, missing paint on frames	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Chimney</b>	missing bricks	<b>Minimal</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	uneven, buckling stones	<b>Severe</b>

Chart 2: East  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

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<b>Rocky Branch School Rehabilitation Outline Exterior: Left Façade (North)</b>			
<b>Index</b>	<b>Building Location</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat Level</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Windows</b>	<b>Missing first bay</b>	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Weatherboard</b>	<b>molding along base</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Chart 3: North  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015



AutoCAD Drawing 4: South  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

<b>Rocky Branch School Rehabilitation Outline Exterior: Right Façade (South)</b>			
<b>Index</b>	<b>Building Location</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat Level</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Weatherboard</b>	loose pieces, peeling paint	<b>Minimal</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Windows</b>	missing third bay	<b>Moderate</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Foundation</b>	uneven	<b>Severe</b>

Chart 4: South  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

# Section II.II

# Budgeting

Rocky Branch School Rehabilitation Cost Estimations	
Phase Descriptions	Estimated Budget (1,390 sq. ft)
<b>Phase I</b>	
Stabilize foundation	\$5,000
Replace boarded & broken windows (7 windows at \$1,500 each)	\$10,500
Repair roof & replace	\$4,170
Replace siding where rotted & missing	\$10,981
<b>Phase II</b>	
Repair chimneys (2 chimneys at \$1,000 each)	\$2,000
Repair doors and door frames (2 doors at \$500 each)	\$1,000
<b>Phase III</b>	
Rehabilitate flooring	\$3,336
Wall / plaster repair	\$4,420
<i>Contingency</i>	<i>\$6,211</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$41,407 - \$47,618</b>
Average per square foot	\$30

Cost estimates for schoolhouse rehabilitation amount to \$41,907. Specific costs were derived from average construction costs and comparable rehabilitation projects. Renovations factored into the cost estimates include all major work needed on both the interior and exterior. Estimates are broken into three phases in order to convey importance of issues that require the greatest amount of attention first. Rehabilitation should focus on pertinent structural concerns, such as stabilization, before budgeting for aesthetic corrections. Phasing of building concerns will also prove useful in project financing, which can take an incremental and staggered approach.

### The Cameron Foundation

Provides grant opportunities for a range of categories including: healthcare, economic development, arts, and historic preservation/conservation. Grants are awarded biannually with the most recent award cycle allotting almost two million dollars distributed amongst thirty distinct organizations. The value that a grant from The Cameron Foundation has for Rocky Branch is the focus on southern Virginia. The foundation only serves the counties of Dinwiddie, Prince George, and Sussex along with the surrounding cities of Petersburg, Hopewell, and Colonial Heights.

Application Information: <http://camfound.org/apply/application-reporting-procedures>



Image 18. Cameron Fund Logo  
CamFund.org

### Tax Credits

The 20 percent national credit extends to all “qualifying expenses” of the rehabilitation with the minimum amount of financial investment set at \$5,000 (Technical Preservation Services, 2012). In addition, Virginia offers a separate 25 percent state historic tax credit. State and federal tax credits are encouraged for use in conjunction with one another that allows for a total of 45 percent tax credits toward rehabilitation.

Since the credits are offered by the NPS, all rehabilitation efforts must fall in line with the ten guidelines set forth by the Secretary’s Standards for Rehabilitation standards that outline appropriate treatments for any historic structures, including: preserving historic character, repairing not replacing deteriorated features, new additions not harming the historic material, and preserving architectural integrity (Secretary of the Interior, 2015). Finally, the tax credits are specific only to projects that are intended to serve as businesses or other income producing sites.

Application Information: <http://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/application.htm>

Museum education offers learning opportunities that immerse the visitor in a way that promotes interaction and stimulates comprehension. Rocky Branch has already taken the initial steps to engaging in this environment of historical education present throughout southern Virginia. The schoolhouse is a part of the Civil Rights in Education Trail, which pieces together the sites throughout the region that partook in the tradition of self-sufficiency and community connectivity, which made African-American education plausible during most of the twentieth century. In its present state, however, Rocky Branch does not offer any information besides a simple signboard posted out front. Part of the process of restoring the property is creating viable forms of consistent income through the use of education and engagement.

This will require partaking in heritage tourism in a way that draws visitors for not just the historic value of the schoolhouse, but simply for the experience to be had.

To better understand the target audience, it is important to articulate the existing context of historic education in the region. Dinwiddie attracts guests primarily through heritage tourism, which is divided into two parts: the motivations and the perceptions of tourists who visit any cultural site (Poria, 2001, pp. 1048). These two concepts can intertwine with the basis that guests are motivated to visit a site because of a perception that that it represents their own heritage or, if they do not share a similar heritage, that it is simply due to its “heritage attributes” (Poria, pp. 1048). Dinwiddie presents the unique opportunity for Rocky Branch to truly take advantage of this dichotomy that exists within cultural tourism due to the large presence of Civil War tourism. Presenting the Rocky Branch School as a compliment to this already solidified historical entity would tap into those tourists who are motivated solely by a site’s attributes.



Image 19: Signboard  
Photo Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

Current display board signage is aged and weathered. Refurbishing the current sign would offer a simple and cost effective way to take advantage of a resource that already provides for a decent amount of information necessary for a baseline understanding of Rocky Branch and its significance to Dinwiddie. Additionally, road signage for the Civil Rights in Education Trail appear along Rocky Branch Road and Route 636 to help direct visitors to the school's relatively remote location.

If museums are understood to be positive influences on maintaining senses of place and community, then it is imperative that they remain socially engaged (Black, 2010, p. 131). Working to engage the community helps foster a sense of pride and ownership around the museum and its offerings. In this case, museums extend beyond institutions of knowledge and into the role of facilitator, endowed with the responsibility of activating social and cultural discussions. Too often there is a disconnect between generations in perceptions around how regional identity and historical identity tie into each other. Public participation within museum education and programming places the guest in control of their own museum experience.

There is often a balancing act faced by many small-scale house museums between educating visitors and entertaining them. For Rocky Branch, telling the story of the struggle for education from the perspective of those who were involved in these community-funded schools is the foremost mission. However, presenting that material in a way that connects to younger generations is, in itself, a challenge. To overcome this obstacle, museums have taken steps to engage the local community. The Hempsted property in New London, Connecticut is a nationally recognized historic home that is situated within a diverse neighborhood. However, the neighborhood had little in common with its historic neighbor (Center for the Future of Museums, 2013). Organizers then reached out to area teenagers and presented them with the opportunity to reinterpret the site in a way that they felt was most appealing while remaining historically accurate. This understanding of museums as a form of grassroots efforts is a reflection in the attitude towards recognizing the impact that museums have on their surrounding communities.



# Section II.III

*“The museum is much more than a typological collection of evidence of past-time frames but is, rather, the storehouse and protector of the memory of humankind.”*

**-Graham Black, Center for Museum and Heritage Management**

**The Professor Wilson School in Petersburg, VA, 1900.**  
Site No. 14 on the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail

**Civil Rights in Education HERITAGE TRAIL**  
A SELF-GUIDED DRIVING TOUR THROUGH SOUTHEAST VIRGINIA

**The Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail** was established by the Old Dominion Resource Conservation & Development Council. It is managed by Virginia's Retreat, a tourism marketing consortium comprised of the counties of Amelia, Appomattox, Brunswick, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Halifax, Lunenburg, Middleburg, Northampton, and Prince Edward and the City of Petersburg.

For additional information on the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail, the Lee's Retreat or Wilson-Ewart's Raid Civil War driving tours, outdoor recreation opportunities, or other attractions, events and accommodations in southern Virginia, call 1-800-6-RETRAIT or visit [www.varetreat.com](http://www.varetreat.com).

Virginia's Retreat  
425 Cockade Alley  
Petersburg, VA 23802

**VIRGINIA'S RETREAT**

**The London school, Misses London. Prior to plantation schooling in the 1840s, Mrs. Frances Landon was instrumental in improving the education and quality of life for the African American in Appomattox County, from 1819 to 1868 she served as the Superintendent of 8 parochial one day Negro Schools.**  
Site No. 7 on the Civil Rights in Education Heritage Trail

The Civil Rights in Education Trail offers networking opportunities for associated museums and historic sites to work together. Since the history of Civil Rights cannot be specified to a single decade or moment in time, the experience of Civil Rights in education spans multiple generations. Although pivotal to African-American education, resistance to school integration is only part of the larger narrative in the struggle for education. It is important to highlight sites that pay tribute to the earliest years of the Civil Rights Movement at the turn of the century. Larger institutions included on the Trail, like the Moton Museum and Virginia State University, offer opportunities and knowledge to sites with limited resources. Actively involving Rocky Branch School in programs, forums, meetings, and events hosted by other Trail participants will build business and potentially economic relationships.

Image 20: Trail Brochure  
VARetreat.com

# Section II.III

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To engage the local Rocky Branch community, an emphasis is placed on capturing the stories of former students through the medium of oral histories. Utilizing the first person experience adds depth to the education provided for. Interviews sought to narrow in on the community structure present that helped to keep Rocky Branch in operation. To understand Rocky Branch School is to understand the social dynamics of Dinwiddie before school integration. Interview prompts were based off resources from the StoryCorp. Project through the Library of Congress.

Image 21: Oral History Prompt  
Credit: R. Tippett, 2015

<b>Rocky Branch Interview Prompt</b>
<b>Name of person interviewed:</b>
<b>Date of interview:</b>
<b>Researcher's name:</b>
<b>Address and phone number of person interviewed:</b>
<b>Date of birth:</b>
<b>Place of birth:</b>
<b>How many years living in this community?</b>
<b>Years attended Rocky Branch?</b>
How would your classmates remember you?
Describe your experiences attending Rocky Branch?
Do you have some favorite stories?
How would you describe the relationship between the community and Rocky Branch?
What would you like to see result from this preservation plan?
Finally, how would you like Rocky Branch to be remembered?

The findings in the research portion of this plan outline the existing conditions of the schoolhouse while examining the potential for tourism and historical interpretation. Intent of this research is to better inform efforts that are aimed at rehabilitation and education. As consideration for Rocky Branch's future begin to take shape, it is crucial that there is a thorough understanding of present challenges but also the extent and wealth in available resources to create a tailored agenda for how the school will adapt for survival. Noting Rocky Branch's placement amongst the tradition of community supported African-American schoolhouses in the south, offers the Sutherland region of Dinwiddie a prime opportunity for historical engagement.

The following section will build on the foundation set forth by the research.

Providing recommendations and prescriptive actions will establish an implementation plan that will ensure that preservation, in its entirety, is an achievable objective.



**Goals**

**Objectives**

**Actions**

## An envisioned future for the Rocky Branch School

The Rocky Branch School is a historic and cultural fixture that serves as a valuable resource for regional education and tourism. The local community supports continued efforts that oversee building preservation and outreach to ensure long term sustainability as a member of Virginia's historic social narrative.



Image 22 Rocky Branch  
Rendering  
Credit: R. Tippet

### Goal 1

Preserve historic character and architectural aesthetic

### Objective 1.1

Approach rehabilitation efforts using needs assessment charts

#### Action 1.1.1

Stabilize structure by addressing foundational issues before other renovations take place

Replace crumbling piers and level the school by ensuring uniformity in pier height

#### Action 1.1.2

Prioritize structural issues by threat level assigned in assessment charts

Most urgent threats include the foundation, rotting and missing siding, and boarded windows

# Section III.II

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## Objective 1.2

Consider long term preservation needs

### Action 1.2.1

Organize efforts that finance and oversee the physical maintenance of any rehabilitation carried out

### Action 1.2.1

Establish an archive to store all rehabilitation work, primary sources, and student accounts



Image: 23-24 Rocky Branch  
Credit: R. Tippett

## Section III.II

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### Objective 1.3

Reclaim historical identity through period appropriate restorations

#### Action 1.3.1

Include former students in the process of recreating an interior aesthetic as close as possible to the period of significance.

Alumni will support exhibits with the inclusion of photographs and personal accounts pertaining to their experiences as students.

#### Action 1.3.2

Take advantage to model after existing examples of successfully-rehabilitated schoolhouses elsewhere in Virginia. Pleasant View School in Chesterfield, Virginia is a structure from the same period as Rocky Branch, now fully restored to replicate its days as a functioning schoolhouse; Pleasant View offers tours to visitors across the state.



Image 25 Pleasant View School  
Credit: Chesterfield Park & Recreation



# Section III.II

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## Goal 2

Ensure long-term sustainability as a historic site

### Objective 2.1

Establish a governance structure specific to Rocky Branch School

#### Action 2.1.1

Set up a Rocky Branch School alumni committee, from those within the congregation, to oversee all educational materials and historical interpretations related to the school

#### Action 2.1.2

Organize an oversight committee to handle all matters pertaining to events, finances, and community outreach and coordination efforts with Rocky Branch Church

## Section III.II

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### Objective 2.2

Remain relevant and appealing to tourists

#### Action 2.2.1

Create Rocky Branch advertisement materials for distribution throughout the region, highlighting it as a historic resource and tourism destination

#### Action 2.2.2

Promote Rocky Branch's identity outside of the Civil Rights in Education Trail. Make connections between Rocky Branch and the historic cultural identity of Sutherland.

#### Action 2.2.3

Goals and expectations for Rocky Branch shall undergo review and revision, if necessary, every three-to-four years.

Insights from other Civil Rights in Education Trail sites, the community, and regional history fixtures, are encouraged.

## Section III.II

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### Goal 3

Encourage community participation within the region.

### Objective 3.1

Actively involve Rocky Branch Church

#### Action 3.1.1

Invest in opportunities that allow for younger members of the congregation to take part in the preservation efforts

Include youth in the decision-making process regarding events and education to bring a generational perspective that will appeal a broader base of tourists

#### Action 3.1.2

Produce an annual survey for distribution amongst the congregation to gauge evolving opinions, interests, and ideas for Rocky Branch School

#### Action 3.1.3

Present goal revisions for the schoolhouse to congregation and solicit feedback in order to formulate a vision that aligns with church

# Section III.II

## Objective 3.2

Utilize schoolhouse to sponsor historical and social events

### Action 3.2.1

Host tours of the schoolhouse

Formulate a historical narrative in order to guide the visitor experience and to allow for full historic and cultural emersion

### Action 3.2.2

Open Rocky Branch to social gatherings that include seasonal festivals and wine tastings

The ample amount of parking and rural landscapes offers an ideal venue to solicit.

### Action 3.2.3

Create living history by hosting school groups in a period setting that's reflective of the every day student experience of Rocky Branch during the early twentieth century



Image 26 Living History  
Credit: wamu.org

## Section III.II

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### Objective 3.3

Engage with local schools and tourism activities

#### Action 3.3.1

Collaborate with Dinwiddie's School Board to create education plans that can involve local students

School tours help to expose younger generations to the history of their own community.



Image 27 Logo  
Credit: DCPS

#### Action 3.3.2

Seek out sponsorship from Dinwiddie's Historical Society and Parks and Recreation departments

Creating a joint partnership between Rocky Branch and local entities can stimulate substantial preservation efforts and help lower cost burden of operations

## Section III.II

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### Goal 4

Actively pursue opportunities that engage in heritage tourism

### Objective 4.1

Build relationships with sites along the Civil Rights in Education Trail

#### Action 4.1.1

Pursue a working relationship with Virginia State University's (VSU) faculty and student body

Rocky Branch can host VSU sponsored initiatives including events, fundraisers, and educational opportunities.

#### Action 4.1.2

Demonstrate Rocky Branch's specific value to VSU's History Department

Engage with courses offered, such as African American Education in the U.S. (HIST 453), in order to capitalize on student involvement

#### Action 4.1.3

Form ties with the R.R. Moton Museum's curatorial staff

In the absence of staffing at Rocky Branch, having connections to those with specific museum-based knowledge about this historical narrative is crucial.

# Section III.II

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## Objective 4.2

Enhance wayfinding through improved signage

### Action 4.2.1

Update signboard located in front of the schoolhouse with integrated technology. A QR Reader located atop the signboard is a simple and cost effective way for visitors to access more information regarding the history of Rocky Branch School, the Civil Rights in Education Trail, and upcoming events.



Image 28 QR  
Credit: Google

### Action 4.2.2

Enlarge street signage along Routes 460 & 636 to better inform and capture attention of tourists and motorists of the Rocky Branch historical site located less than a minute off of Route 636. All sign updates should be a collaborative effort between Rocky Branch, the Civil Rights in Education Trail, and Virginia's Retreat.

Sign dimensions will remain limited to 4.5' x 2.5' along Rt. 636 and 2' x 1.5'.

Goals and recommendations are designed to guide Rocky Branch School as it takes the next steps towards preservation. Most actions prescribed are not limited to a certain amount of time, as they require long-range follow through. Actions like committee oversight and goal revisions are designed to extend past more pressing needs, as one of the tenements for Rocky Branch's vision is to ensure sustainability.

The intent is to involve the community and regional partners in the process of rehabilitation. Engaging with those outside of the Rocky Branch projects will help strengthen the schoolhouse's connectivity and identity by the time preservation efforts are completed. In order for the school to find true success as a heritage destination and representation of a community's cultural past, it must open itself up to the rest of the region.

The Action Implementation Chart details the most necessary actions to carry out first. Those actions not included are assumed to have a continuous time frame.

Plan implementation assumes a two-year timeline to address the majority of correcting actions. The longest time allotments are assigned to the three phases of rehabilitation as designated in the budgeting portion of this plan. Segmenting the approach to rehabilitation is intended as a method for allotting ample time for community collaboration throughout the process.



# Section III.III

## Action Implementation Chart

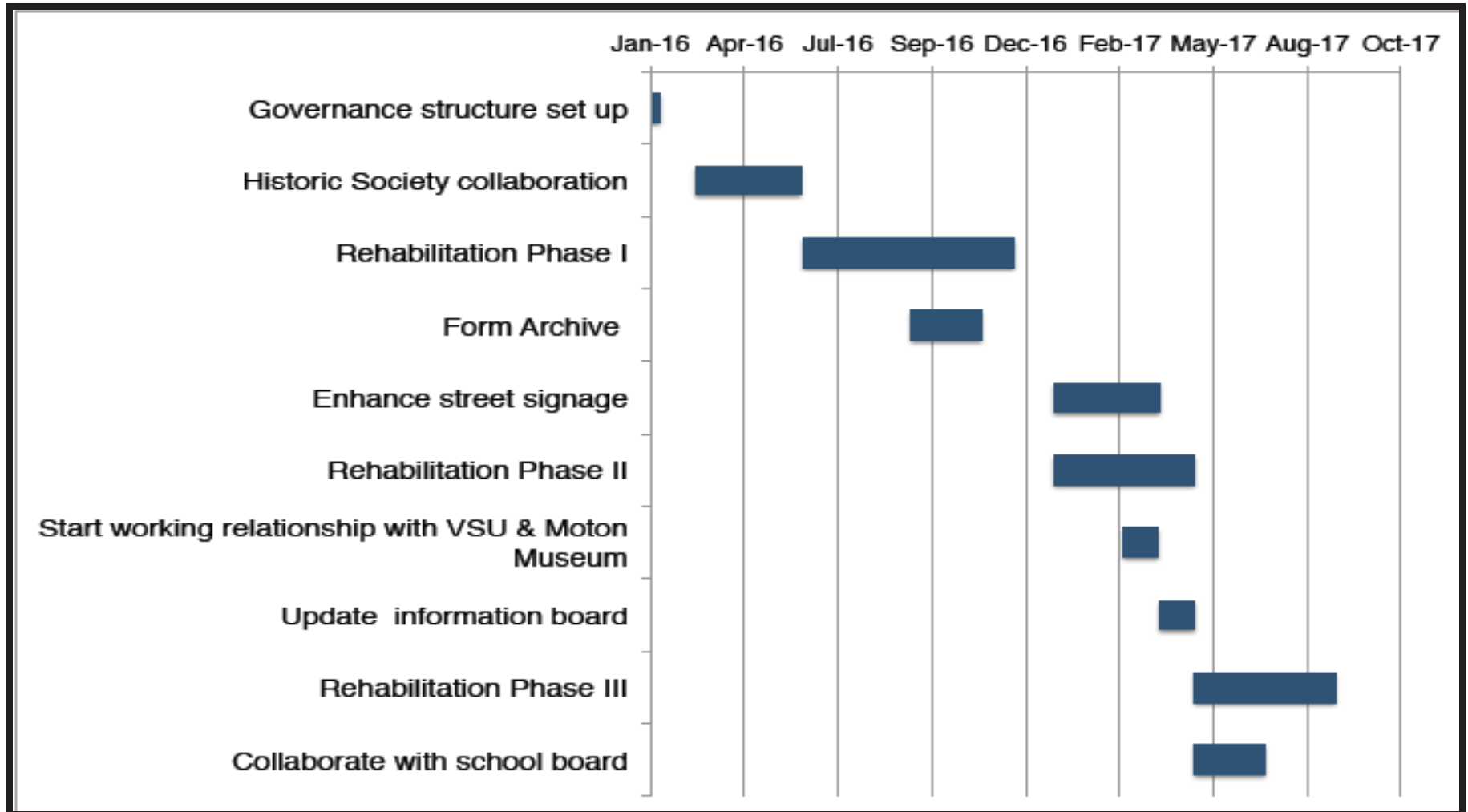


Chart 5:  
Gantt  
Credit: R.  
Tippett, 2015

Rocky Branch School stands as a testament to the fight for equality in education during what is considered as the one of the most tumultuous periods in Virginia's Civil Rights history. Today, Rocky Branch serves not only as a symbol of resilience, but a tangible connection to Sutherland's historical and present cultural identity. Located in a region rich in historical value, Rocky Branch is ideally positioned to enter the landscape of heritage tourism with relative ease. This plan is designed to guide the process moving forward through the establishment of research and correlating recommendations that create a platform for which the Rocky Branch community can build off of.



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Image 1: Rocky Branch School  
circa 1930  
VSU Johnston Memorial Library

# Section IV

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Image: 29 Rocky Branch  
Credit: R. Tippett

Highlighting the attributes that tie Rocky Branch to the larger historical narrative of African-American communities will prove the first step in reconnecting today's society with the story and presence that the schoolhouse had in the lives of its students. As efforts advance in preserving Rocky Branch and its personal history, those involved should find motivation in the fact that saving the schoolhouse extends beyond the physical structure and into the memory of a time and place that was wholly defined by the sense of community.

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# Appendix A

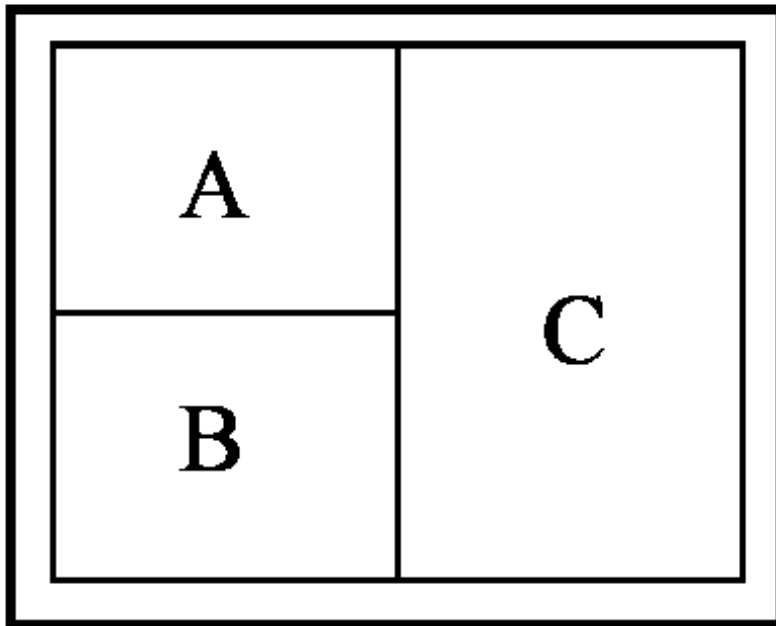
<b>Window Inventory: Rocky Branch School</b>	
<b>Index</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Front (West) Façade</b>	
1	6/6 pane
2	6/6 pane - A2 missing
3	2:1 pane
<b>South Façade</b>	
4	2:1 pane
5	6/6 pane
6	Boarded
<b>Back (East) Façade</b>	
7	6/6 pane - C2 missing
8	6/6 pane - B4 missing
9	6/6 pane
10	6/6 pane
11	6/6 pane - A1 & C2 missing
12	Boarded
<b>North Façade</b>	
13	Boarded
14	6/6 pane
15	6/6 pane

Individual panes on south, east and west façades measure 16"x10"

Individual panes on north façade measure 12"x10"

Individual panes in 2:1 configuration measure 12"x10" on left side and 24"x10" on right side





A1	B1	C1
A2	B2	C2
A3	B3	C3
A4	B4	C4

Site Measurements

Total Square Footage: 1,390 square feet

AutoCAD Drawings

1:1 Annotation Scale

Front Fascade (West)



**Side Fascade  
(South)**



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**Side Fascade  
(North)**



**Back Fascade  
(East)**

