

The 70th Anniversary of the Founding of Chestnut Consolidated High School (1954–2024)

By: David C. Wilson—July 6, 2024

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Introduction

Seventy years have elapsed since Chestnut Consolidated High School (CCHS) opened its doors as one of South Carolina’s equalization schools, with Mr. Edward M. Henry as the principal. The founding of CCHS, a segregated school, in 1954 coincided with the US Supreme Court’s decision on May 17, 1954, that segregation of students by race was unconstitutional. To that end, during this year’s annual alumni banquet, it is appropriate to celebrate the 70th anniversary of CCHS’s founding and opening.

The school’s last graduating class was on June 4, 1970, with Mr. Josephus R. Taylor as principal, which is the same year when all schools in South Carolina desegregated. The students of CCHS (Black) and Wampee-Little River High School (White) merged to form a newly integrated school: North Myrtle Beach High School (NMBHS) in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. NMBHS initially occupied the same building that CCHS previously occupied.

CCHS’s establishment in 1954 replaced the former Poplar Training School for Black students in the Poplar–Wampee–Little River–Atlantic Beach (South Carolina) attendance area. CCHS’s founding was one of many post-Rosenwald initiative schools constructed in Southern states, including South Carolina, in the 1950s. Therefore, in this essay I give a brief historical snapshot of CCHS’s history in the evolution of educating Black children in Horry County from the start of the Rosenwald initiative schools to the equalization schools, and I discuss the desegregation of all schools in South Carolina in 1970.

As we continue with these celebratory annual banquets and the award of scholarships to descendants of those who attended the school, we can take pride in any positive impact, small or large, that CCHS has cont.



Poplar Training School (1926–1954)
Rosenwald Initiative School—Segregated (Black)
Poplar Community (Wampee), South Carolina



Chestnut Consolidated High School (1954–1970)
Equalization School—Segregated (Black)
North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina



North Myrtle Beach High School (1970–present)
Desegregated School—Integrated (Everyone)
North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Introduction, cont.

had and continues to have on our life and the lives of our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. The CCHS Alumni Association, founded in 1995, has since awarded more than \$52,000 in scholarships to descendants of alumni who attended the former school and erected a historical marker in 2011. In fairness, we should research and tell CCHS's history in the context of the school's existence on a time line: before, during, and after its existence, as I depict in this essay. Thus, the school was part of the many significant steps in the spectrum from slavery to complete legal integration.

The Rosenwald Initiative Schools (1925–1954)

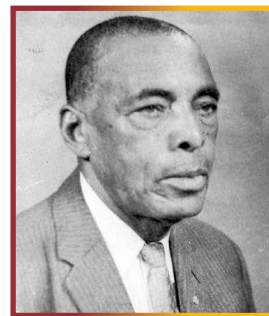
The Rosenwald initiative program in the 1920s was the first impactful organized effort in the Southern states to educate Black children. In 1911, New York philanthropist Julius Rosenwald partnered with the incomparable Dr. Booker T. Washington to perform a magnificent public service. Their contribution provided seed grants for the construction of schools, shops, and teachers' houses built by and for Black Americans. The typical community school constructed under this program was a two-room wooden structure with outdoor toilets and drinking water, usually a hand water pump on the school grounds.

The Rosenwald initiative had four parts: (1) Rosenwald appropriation, (2) White contribution, (3) Black contribution (local community), and (4) public contribution. Prior to and during the Rosenwald initiative, Black children living in rural areas attended classes in their local churches. Even after this initiative, some Black children in Horry County continued to attend school in their local church until 1954.

Some of the grammar schools associated with the CCHS attendance area that were constructed under the Rosenwald initiative during the late 1920s and early 1930s were Poplar Training School (initially Poplar Grove Colored School), St. Paul Colored School, Mt. Zion Colored School, Freemont Colored School, Cedar Branch Colored School, and Brooksville Colored School. Construction of some school buildings for Black students occurred before and shortly after the Rosenwald initiative. Construction of schools after the

Rosenwald initiative most likely occurred because the student population in a community was too small to qualify for the program, or the community did not or could not raise the necessary matching funds to participate in it. Additionally, communities used various resources to cobble together some Black grammar schools, and some communities continued using their church as a schoolhouse. The county paid for teachers in all four categories of schools: (1) Rosenwald, (2) county, (3) church, and (4) those the community cobbled together. Examples: the county constructed Todd Swamp Colored School (Red Bluff community) as a non-Rosenwald initiative school in the mid-1930s, Little River Neck was a church school, and Mt. Calvary #1 was a non-Rosenwald initiative school the community cobbled together in the 1940s. These three schools eventually became feeder schools to CCHS through Chestnut Elementary and Poplar Elementary Schools.

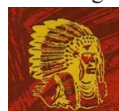
An example of contributions by the four parts of the Rosenwald initiative was the former Poplar Training School constructed in 1926 at a cost of \$4,650. The breakdown of contributions was as follows: Rosenwald (\$1,100), White (\$0), Black (\$1,550), and public (\$2,000). Constructed on five acres of land, the new school had four teachers. The Black community contribution was 34 percent greater than the contribution from the Rosenwald Foundation (Wilson, 2018). The share of the Black contribution is a testament to the Black community's determination to educate their children. The number of teachers employed at the school from 1926 to 1954 grew from four to 13, which equated to 225 percent. The estimated student population for the same period grew from approximately 100 to 354 (elementary and high schools combined), which equated to 254 percent. In 1954, the school was upgraded** to equalization school standards and changed to Poplar Elementary School (Grades 1–6). Hence, there were many schools where the community matching funds exceeded the Rosenwald contribution.



Jacob T. Chestnut*

* Mr. Jacob T. Chestnut was the first principal of the former Poplar Training School and CCHS was named in his honor. Moreover, he was responsible for getting the Poplar Grove Colored School approved to offer high school courses; thus, the Poplar Grove Colored School was renamed Poplar Training School in 1941. He was a pioneer, educator, and farmer.

** "Upgrade" throughout this essay means replacing the old Rosenwald-styled wooden buildings with new modern brick buildings on the same campus that met the standards of South Carolina's equalization schools.



The Establishment of CCHS as an Equalization School (1954–1970)

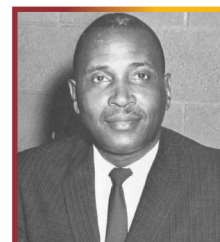
In anticipation of a future Supreme Court decree ruling against segregation based on a lawsuit—that twenty African American parents filed in Clarendon County (1950) to challenge South Carolina’s “separate but equal” education provision (*Briggs* case) that the high court agreed to hear—triggered the idea of an equalization program to circumvent integration of the schools. The *Briggs* lawsuit made its way to the high court, which became *Briggs v. Elliott*, 342 US 350 (1952)—before it was remanded back to the lower court for further review. The US Supreme Court formulated the “separate but equal” doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 US 537 (1896), ruling that segregation by race was legal as long as equal facilities and resources were provided to both races.

To pay for the schools’ equalization program, Governor James F. Byrnes (1951–55) proposed a tax to improve education for Black students, and, in 1951, the state passed a three-cent sales tax. CCHS opened in 1954 as an equalization school. Although the governor codified the words to “improve education for Black students” in his proposal, the primary reason for this plan was—with emphasis—to preserve school segregation. Thus, the words “preserve segregation” appear with the wording on the CCHS historical marker, which the CCHS Alumni Association erected in 2011.

In Horry County from 1953 to 1955, there were 13 known equalization schools constructed. Two (Poplar Training and Whittemore High) of the 13 were upgraded to equalization school status.* The 13 schools were the following: (1) Bucksport Elementary—*Bucksport*; (2) Carver Elementary—*Myrtle Beach*; (3) Cedar Creek Elementary—*Finklea area*; (4) Chestnut Elementary and High—*Wampee area*; (5) Cochran Elementary School—*Conway area*; (6) Finklea Elementary and High—*Finklea area*; (7) Levister Elementary—*Aynor area*; (8) Longs Elementary—*Longs area*; (9) Poplar Elementary—*Poplar area*; (10) St. James Elementary—*Burgess area*; (11) Watson Elementary—*Loris area*; (12) Whittemore Elementary—*Conway area*; and (13) Whittemore High—*Conway area*.

To mitigate any potential abuse by local politicians and school districts, the state administered and controlled the equalization schools’ program through the education finance committee in Columbia, South

Carolina, to ensure fair administration of new schools’ construction or upgrade.* In my historical research, I discovered that, despite this safeguard, some local school districts secretly swapped their older furniture for the new furniture in the newly constructed schools for Black students and used the new furniture in their schools. These kinds of chicaneries were more difficult to carry out with school buses, most likely because of their visibility and authorities could track the buses by serial numbers.



Edward M. Henry
First Principal
(1954–1969)

All records pertaining to the construction of the equalization schools were destroyed in a fire in 1961 when the building they were stored in burned down (South Carolina Department of Archives and History). The destruction of these records has made it impossible to obtain information about, for example, architectural drawings, construction materials, and the number and location of these schools.

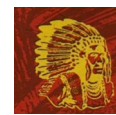
According to South Carolina Standards for Accredited High Schools (1952), each public high school in the state operated under one of four plans, namely 6-3-3, 8-4, 7-7, and 6-6. For example, the name of the entire school was Chestnut Consolidated School (CCS), which housed grades 1–12. Therefore, the CCS operated under the state’s Department of Education 6-6 plan, which meant that elementary school consisted of grades 1–6 (six years) and the high school of grades 7–12 (six years), which made up the high school known as CCHS, a subset of CCS. With this plan, students in grades 7–8 were part of the high school and allowed to participate in all high school activities, including sports; however, they received high school credit only for grades 9–12. There were few if any middle schools for Black students in the state’s dual school system for educating children. The CCHS feeder schools were Longs Elementary (grades 1–6), Poplar Elementary (grades 1–6), and Chestnut Elementary (grades 1–6). Today, most county high schools operate under the 8-4 plan (i.e., grades 9–12).

The Impact of CCHS on Students’ Academics and Activities (1954–1970)

Despite the delay in integrating the schools from 1954 to 1970, Black parents and students alike saw the establishment of CCHS as the dawn of a new day



* *Ibid.*, 2.

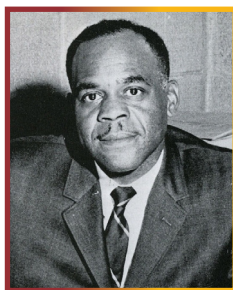


The Impact of CCHS on Students' Academics and Activities (1954–1970), cont.

in educating their children. There is no doubt that equalization schools such as CCHS were an improvement in resources compared to the Rosenwald initiative schools. For example, students for the first time had access to indoor plumbing, a science laboratory, more certified teachers, a library, a gymnasium to hold assemblies, drama activities, and indoor sports such as basketball. Additionally, more students were able to continue their education and graduate from high school. The school eventually added a football team and a marching band by the mid-1960s.

From the founding of CCHS in 1954 to its closure in 1970, the teacher and student populations grew by 120 percent (10 to 22) and 164 percent (246 to 650), respectively. Despite these significant gains, the core curriculum did not significantly improve with additional courses in science, math, art, speech, and music. For example, the high school curriculum in the new school (CCHS) was the same as that of the Rosenwald initiative school that it replaced, that is, the Poplar Training School. Therefore, there was no improvement in the quality of the curriculum from Poplar Training School to CCHS. Hence, there was no math beyond 10th grade for the first eight to 10 years of the school's existence; there was no advanced algebra, trigonometry, geometry, or physics; rather, the focus continued to be on vocational agriculture, vocational home economics, typing, commercial law, civics, shop, and so on.* When viewed in the context of the era, the principal most likely went along with the situation because he lacked a voice in the decision-making process, as did virtually all Black principals throughout South Carolina and other Southern states during this period.

Additionally, there was significant variation in the strength of curricula in Black public schools throughout the state. For example, in Horry County, Whittemore High School had a stronger curriculum than CCHS, and the state had accredited it to issue state high school diplomas since the beginning of school year 1937–1938, whereas CCHS's forerunner Poplar Training School was not state-accredited until school year 1951–1952



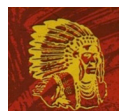
Josephus R. Taylor
Second Principal
(1969–1970)

(South Carolina Department of Education). Therefore, not all graduates from the school before 1952 received a state high school diploma. Rather, they received a local diploma without the governor's signature and the state's emblem embossed on it. Note: Black students from all over the county during the 1940s and early 1950s traveled to Conway or boarded with a family to attend Whittemore High School because it was the county's only state-accredited high school for Black students. Loris and Poplar Training Schools were not state-accredited until school years 1949–1950 and 1951–1952, respectively.

Opposition to School Desegregation (1950–1970)

To highlight the state's strong opposition to dismantling segregated schools, the South Carolina legislature in 1952 approved a constitutional amendment empowering lawmakers to close public schools if necessary to prevent integration (Nicholson, 1952). To ensure closure of the schools, the amendment also deleted from the state's constitution the mandate that the state should provide free public education. This meant that South Carolina eliminated from its constitution any mention of public schooling as a state obligation, and thus lawmakers would be free to shift to private schools if such a plan should become feasible. The idea was that South Carolina was prepared to close its schools and colleges rather than integrate. Other Southern states closely watched the progress of the *Briggs v. Elliott* court case. Consequently, the court combined four other states with similar cases to *Briggs* in 1951–52 that became *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483 (1954). The civil rights giant Thurgood Marshall headed up the court cases. This combination caused panic among southern segregationists, which prompted these Southern states' legislatures to form a resistance movement (see footnote, page 5) to prevent any desegregation of schools. Moreover, the resistance movement in the Southern states put forth many proposals and passed legislation on some of them to circumvent integration in anticipation of the court ruling against segregation even before the 1954 ruling in the *Brown* case, which ruled that segregation in public schools by race was unconstitutional. The resistance movement continued for at least another 16 years to 1970.

The common focus among individual states on developing circumvention measures was to make their school system privately owned because doing so would



*Schools were allowed to skip teaching required courses such as all four units of math if class size was fewer than 10.



Opposition to School Desegregation (1950–1970), cont.

no longer subject them to the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause or other court decisions on segregation. Achieving this goal meant selling the entire school system or turning it over to private owners. A private school system meant that the state would pay individual vouchers to all students who attended private schools segregated by race; therefore, this would allow White parents to send their children to private schools, which would be outside the constraints of the constitution or any court decision. Some of the Southern states even proposed not giving vouchers to Black students at all, which would have left them without the opportunity to attend school.

In *Brown v. Board of Education II*, 349 US 294 (1955), the US Supreme Court, in a 9–0 decision, threw the Southern states a lifeline to buy time before having to comply with the 1954 *Brown* decision. *Brown II* held that the dismantling of separate school systems for Black and White students could proceed with “all deliberate speed,” an addendum that gave the Southern states more time to dismantle their dual education system. It unintentionally opened the way for various strategies resistance to integrate fully. In my view, judging from Francis B. Nicholson’s “The Legal Standing of the South’s School Resistance Proposals” (1954), had the court not ruled as it did in *Brown II*, the Southern states attempts to preserve segregation in schools would have been a national catastrophe. Therefore, over the ensuing 16 years, cooler heads prevailed as the states proposed and tried different gimmicks or circumvention measures to preserve segregation.*

Freedom of Choice Program (1965–1970)

The most famous of the chicaneries or circumvention measures to thwart integration was the Freedom of Choice Program. About 90 percent of southern school districts implemented this plan starting in the mid-1960s. The plan allowed for a few Black students to volunteer to attend a White school and vice versa. In the end a few Black students attended White schools, whereas no White students attended Black schools. For example, a few students from CCHS (Black) attended the Wampee-Little River High School (White), and a few White teachers came over to CCHS. However,

*The following was an enhancement to the earlier resistance movement in 1954: In 1956, the Massive Resistance doctrine was formed—which was a collection of laws passed individually by legislatures of Southern states to resist integration of schools. The laws included punishing any public school who dared to integrate by withholding state funds from the school. The high court struck down all the circumvention measures, one-by-one.

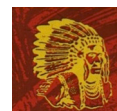
no White students volunteered to attend CCHS. The idea was that a few Black students mixed with a much larger population of White children was tolerable in a pseudo integration setting rather than full integration. Therefore, political and school district leaders hoped that this plan would satisfy the 1955 *Brown II* “all deliberate speed” decree without dismantling the dual school system and go to a unitary school system. Judging from its results, this plan was severely flawed from its inception.

Consequently, the US Supreme Court ruled 9–0 in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 391 US 430 (1968), that this plan did not meet the *Brown II* standard and struck it down. Even though many political and education leaders realized that the jig was up after this ruling, many Southern states continued with the program to the end. Acting on an NAACP lawsuit to integrate South Carolina’s Darlington and Greenville school districts, a federal court gave these school districts a deadline of February 16, 1970, to integrate their schools or lose all federal funding. This ruling effectively applied to all school districts in the state. Complete integration would require dismantling the state’s dual school system and implementing a unitary system, which occurred in the fall of 1970.

Desegregated Public Schools (1970–present)

Although the US Supreme Court ruled in *Brown* (1954) that segregation of students by race was unconstitutional, the public schools in Southern states, including South Carolina, continued to maintain their dual school system of educating Black and White children. These states preserved segregated schools by race for 16 years after the *Brown* decision with endless circumvention measures until 1970. Based on my research and my view, I would say that the resistance to integration by states in the Deep South closely resembled the resistance to ending slavery in 1860. The resistance movement was ferocious! Had the US Supreme not issued its vague ruling in *Brown II* (see next paragraph) regarding “all deliberate speed” to integrate schools, which allowed more time to integrate and cooler heads to prevail among southern segregationists, the South could have potentially exploded.

The irony of the *Plessy* (1896) and *Brown* (1954) decisions is that both were based on the 14th



Desegregated Public Schools (1970–present), cont. Amendment’s equal protection clause but arrived at opposite conclusions. It appears that the court in *Plessy* tried to square separate with equal—an obvious and significantly wrong decision.

South Carolina Governor Robert E. McNair departed from other governors in the Deep South by agreeing with the court order to desegregate schools. Here are some excerpts from his interview with *The New York Times* on January 28, 1970: “We’ve run out of courts, and we’ve run out of time, and we must adjust to new circumstances,” he told a statewide television audience. “I will oppose any attempts to close public schools. The only way South Carolina is going to continue to grow is through its educational programs. We’re going to have to maintain, support and strengthen our public school system.” The governor stated that he would oppose any attempt to repeal the state’s compulsory school attendance law.* “We don’t want to bring up another generation of illiterates,” he said. Ironically, in 1954, the sitting governor (James F. Byrnes, 1951–1955) was prepared to close the entire public school system rather than integrate, whereas 16 years later (1970) the sitting governor (McNair, 1965–1971) stated that South Carolina would comply with the court and integrate the schools in an orderly manner. On the basis of his actions, Governor McNair led the state to school integration with less turbulence compared to other Southern states in desegregating their school system in the 1960s and 1970s.

It seems Governor McNair’s experience with the Orangeburg Massacre in 1968 drove his more conciliatory approach to full integration after state troopers murdered three Black students at South Carolina State College (now South Carolina State University) during his tenure. In 2006, decades after leaving office, Governor McNair admitted to full responsibility for the murders. He passed away a year later on November 17, 2007.

Summary

Although the Rosenwald initiative and the equalization program improved educational opportunities for Black students in South Carolina and Horry County, education funding for Black students never equaled that for White students, including CCHS and other

equalization schools. There were pros and cons regarding the complete desegregation of schools such as CCHS in Horry County in 1970, a discussion that will likely continue for years to come.

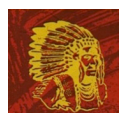
I have substantially researched the equalization schools and discovered that Black students after desegregation had access to a stronger curriculum and a variety of sports and other competitive activities. Additionally, I have analyzed student performance in several of South Carolina’s school districts, including Horry County, over the past 15 years but could not discern a credible way to compare performance before and after desegregation. This is mainly because the districts did not evaluate students with the variety of tests used today to compare performance in areas such as English language arts, math, science, and social studies. However, organizations such as the Economic Policy Institute found that school integration has not appreciably closed the performance gap between White and Black students over the decades.

One of the biggest inaccuracies about the construction of the new equalization schools was that Black students had better schools than White students. Yes, that may have been cosmetically true compared to the older brick schools that White students already had. However, those who made this assumption did not see the curricula or the inside of the school buildings. Although the number of school buses for Black students increased after equalization, the curricula were generally weak, and many of the new buildings for the equalization schools were hollowed out academically and materially. At the time, neither the Black students nor their parents knew just how unequal the equalization schools were when compared to White schools. For example, in school year 1968–69, of the three secondary schools for Black students in Horry County, one was on “Warned” (CCHS) and one was on “Probation” (Finklea High), and one was “All Clear” (Whittemore High). Moreover, of the 10 secondary schools for White students none was on “Warned” or “Probation.”** This means that for school year 1968–69 an equalization secondary school for Black students were seven times (7x) more likely to be put on “Warned” or “Probation” than a secondary school for White students.

Those writing about the integration of public

*Repealing the compulsory school attendance law would have allowed parents to keep their children out of school rather than send them to school with Black children. They would receive no punishment for failing to comply with the state’s compulsory school attendance age of 6 to 17 years old because the law would no longer exist if repealed.

**Annual Report on Accreditation of High Schools in South Carolina (1968–1969).



Summary, cont.

schools in Horry County often mistakenly claim that, for example, Wampee-Little River High School integrated in 1965. However, a few Black students from CCHS under the Freedom of Choice Program (which was a gimmick) did attend the school at that time while the school district continued the dual school system. It is historically incorrect that schools desegregated before 1970.

One of the many glaring examples of the loss of history is that all of CCHS's trophies, awards, and ribbons its students earned disappeared in 1970 when the school was discontinued and merged with Wampee-Little River High School (White) to form the newly integrated NMBHS. I conducted a search in 2015 for these artifacts to no avail. They were a huge part of CCHS's history.

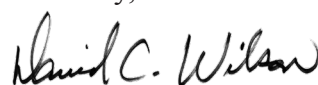
It has been 70 years since the school's establishment and 54 years since its closure in 1970. From 1955 to 1970 the number of graduates per year increased from 17 to 63 (270 percent), excluding adult education graduates.

For the sake of our posterity, let us pray and hope

that future generations will remember us for doing the best we could with what was available to us at the time. We had few resources in coping with the pressures and challenges of living as second-class citizens in a society that was hostile toward us on almost all fronts. Nevertheless, we became productive citizens, raised families, and contributed to society. To that end, if we believe that the output of each generation becomes the input for the next generation, then our efforts will not have been in vain.

Thank you for letting me share this little piece of CCHS's history with you on this most momentous occasion. May God bless all!

Sincerely,



David C. Wilson, 1962

Note: I attended Todd Swamp Colored School, Poplar Elementary School, and Chestnut Consolidated High School.



David C. Wilson

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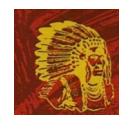
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FOLKS AND THINGS

By 2054 This Bill Should Be Terrific

...I think it was that the same old his five that army leaders figured it wasn't so easy to steal a horse from a Kentuckian soldier.

STATE THE TOPEKA JOURNAL

By McElroy Publications, Inc.
Topeka, Kansas, Monday, May 17, 1954—Twenty-four Pages

Home Edition
FIVE CENTS

SCHOOL SEGREGATION BANNED

Supreme Court Refutes Doctrine of Separate but Equal Education

High Tribunal Fails to Specify When Practice of Dual Schools Must Be Dropped by States

Washington, May 17 (AP)—The Supreme court ruled unanimously Monday that segregation of Negro and white students in public schools is unconstitutional. Just

These sixty minutes will be held by the National ...

Court Ruling Hailed

Segregation Already Ending School Officials



Turnpike Bonds ...

“Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local government. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society... WE CONCLUDE THAT IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION THE DOCTRINE OF 'SEPARATE BUT EQUAL' HAS NO PLACE. SEPARATE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE INHERENTLY UNEQUAL.”

Oliver L. Brown, et al. vs Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, United States Supreme Court, May 17, 1954.



26 27

CHESTNUT CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL

Chestnut Consolidated School, which was located here 1954-1970, was built under the equalization program of Gov. James F. Byrnes, intended to preserve segregation by building new schools for blacks. Named to honor Horry County educator J.T. Chestnut (1885-1967), it educated African-American students in grades 1-12.

(Continued on other side)

ERECTOR BY THE CHESTNUT CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, 2411

Front

26 27

CHESTNUT CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL

(Continued from other side)

This school, consolidating schools in several northeastern Horry County communities, was a one-story brick building with two wings. After county schools desegregated in 1970, it became North Myrtle Beach High School and was later North Myrtle Beach Middle School. The 1954 building was demolished in 1995.

ERECTOR BY THE CHESTNUT CONSOLIDATED HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION, 2411

Back



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