

**LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**  
**Randolph High School**  
**South Kirkman Street, Liberty Township, Liberty, N.C.**  
**Randolph County, N.C.**

**LOCAL LANDMARK SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

Some of the first efforts to formalize educational opportunities for black youth in Randolph County can be dated to 1870 with the establishment of the Liberty School, Liberty, N.C. This school was in an old Methodist Church located near the black Cemetery with an enrollment of approximately 25 students. The Liberty School was an attempt by African-American citizens and local Quakers of Randolph County to provide for the education of black children. Many of these early black schools were forerunners of the Rosenwald Schools built in the United States, seven of which were in Randolph County (Asheboro and Liberty, N.C.) A Rosenwald School was the name informally applied to over five thousand schools, shops, and teachers' homes in the United States which were built primarily for the education of African-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The need arose from the chronic underfunding of public education for African-American children in the South, who were required to attend segregated schools. The Rosenwald Fund was founded by Sears Roebuck President Julius Rosenwald. The Rosenwald School in Liberty, N.C. was in operation from 1927-1928 as a Type 4 building which reflected the number of rooms in the school.

Randolph High School dates from 1951 and was used as a consolidated school for black children throughout most of Randolph County. According to Charles Kuhn, chairman of the Eastern Randolph County Committee for Better Schools, Randolph High School was built as a showplace to satisfy the old "separate but equal" philosophy. Randolph High School also used special funding provided by the National Defense Educational Assistance Program for purchasing science and mathematics teaching equipment.

The end of Randolph High School came in 1965 under Title VI which barred the use of federal funds for segregated education and schools.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE (references)**

[www.reformedreader.org/history/whitted.negrobaptists12](http://www.reformedreader.org/history/whitted.negrobaptists12)

[www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/rosenwald/rosenNR.htm](http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/rosenwald/rosenNR.htm)

Greensboro Daily News, Saturday, March 12, 1966

Greensboro Daily News, March 12, 1961

The Courier Tribune, Warren Dixon, January 28, 2012

[www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0858852.html](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0858852.html)

The Liberty School was established in 1870 in an old Methodist Church. Its purpose was to provide educational opportunities for black children that were not normally available. The importance of educating black youth was advocated by many local black clergymen foremost of which was Rev. Anthony W. Welborne. Reverend Welborne was born in Randolph County on February 3, 1840. He united with the Liberty Grove Church in 1870, and was ordained in the Baptist Church of High Point prior to taking charge of Liberty Grove. He held successful charge of eighteen churches of the Piedmont section; assisted in the ordination of twenty one persons to the gospel ministry. He was one of the pioneers of the Rowan Association and the Moderator of the High Point Association for many years. Rev. Welborne was comparatively illiterate however he was dedicated to advancing the access to education required for Negro children. His dedication helped schools such as The Liberty School survive during difficult social and economic times.

The Liberty School had an enrollment of 25 students in 1870. The teacher for the first ten years was a white school master. The first one room school house was erected in 1900 and a two room building replaced it in 1915. In 1927, the two room school was destroyed by fire and replaced by a four room brick school. This building was destroyed in 1947. After the fire, churches again opened their doors for the education of black children until three barracks were erected. On June 5, 1950, plans by architect J.J. Croft were approved for the new Liberty Colored School. The school reopened in the Fall of 1951 as Randolph High School.

Randolph High School, for most of its existence, was the only consolidated county high school for black students in Randolph County. Built in 1951 at a cost of \$132,000 just west of what was then in the city limits of Liberty, it eventually had 14 classrooms, a library, home economics and science rooms, plus a combination gymnasium and cafeteria. Black students were bused to Liberty from as far away as Seagrove, some riding for two hours to get to school.

According to statistics in the March 7, 1955 edition of The Courier-Tribune newspaper, there were 1548 white students enrolled in Randolph County schools in 1948-49 and 1627 in 1953-54. But in the 1948-49 school year, there were only 82 black students enrolled. In 1953-54, there were 128.

Randolph High School was made possible through the efforts of N.C. Governor W. Kerr Scott, who pushed through a bond referendum for both school buildings and secondary roads in N.C. during 1949. According to the historical resource book entitled "Randolph County, 1779-1979" "extensive repairs were made to most school buildings, additions were built, and one new

building, a high school for Negro students in Liberty, was erected. For the first time ever, over 75% of the secondary roads used as bus routes to the schools were paved in 1954”.

According to the late Francis Swaim’s notes, “A dedicatory service for the new high school was held in neighboring St. Stephens AME Church on 23 September 1951. The new school was the pride of the black community and most activities of the people centered around the school and/or the several churches in West Liberty”.

For six years, Randolph High School students either brought their lunches from home or purchased milk and sandwiches from the school. Finally in 1957, a gymnasium-cafeteria building was added to the campus and for the first time, students were offered hot lunches.

A March 5, 1959, article in The Courier-Tribune reported that “Randolph County Negro schools will be modernized into structures adequate for any future needs under present planning in the March 10 bond issue referendum. The three Randolph County schools, Randolph High, Trinity Elementary and John M. Caviness Elementary, will each boast a library, physical education building, adequate classrooms, and gymnasiums”. The article went on to say that Randolph High School had a 1957 enrollment of 236 elementary and 148 high school pupils.

In 1961, principal F.A. Stafford, Jr., proclaimed, “We expect 437 enrollment when all the fall crops are in and our children enroll.” Of those, 155 were high school students.

The Greensboro Record newspaper noted that in 1961, Randolph High School was one of two Negro high schools in Randolph County that “both are among the finest in the county.” At the time, the school had a band, glee club, basketball team, and 4-H club. An addition of four classrooms had just been added and the cafeteria stocked with all new equipment. The school, just 10 years old, was one of the most modern in the county.

Four years later, the school was closed. And it remains today closed for 47 years. School desks were piled in corners of classrooms, books left to mold in boxes and pots and pans were left hanging in the cafeteria kitchen. A clock still hangs on the wall of a classroom, signaling the exact time the doors closed.

Randolph High School came to an end when Title VI barred the use of federal funds for segregated education and schools. But integration didn’t close Randolph High School, bigotry did. In a 1966 issue of the Greensboro Daily News, a member of the “Eastern Randolph County Committee for Better Schools” admitted that “many of the parents did not desire their children to walk to and from school in this area”.

Over the years, many black leaders, especially the late Rev. Phillip McCleave, lobbied to no avail for some constructive use of the abandoned school. McCleave, a longtime beloved area minister, became the school’s biggest advocate, but his voice fell on deaf ears. In 1978, he said

“To waste a facility like that when the need is so great --- and I have gone as far as to say this to the Governor ----- borders on the unpardonable sin.”

In 1980, The Randolph County School Board finally put the school up for auction and it is in private ownership this day by former student Lewis H. White.

The significance of Randolph High School as a Randolph County Cultural Heritage Site can best be determined by memories of those attending the school. As part of this record, memories provided by former students Gordon E. White and Selena Shoffner-Alston are provided as part of this Historical Context and Significance:

Gordon E. White has written: “In 1946 as a young boy at the age of six years old residing in Liberty, N.C., I attended what was then known as “Liberty Negro School”. It was located where the Paul Henry Smith Park is located today. In 1947, the school burned, and was replaced with three barracks. I can always recall when the school burned because my brand new coat was unrecovered in the fire. Shortly thereafter in 1951, Randolph High School opened. I was proud to be a student at Randolph High School. It was almost like a family affair attending with some of my older brothers and sisters who were also students, and my mother who was the school dietician. This was in a day where student lunches were a mere .35 cents and students were allowed to eat until there was no food left to be served. I remember vividly each day being a learning experience. I accomplished many personal goals as a student at Randolph High School. I share stories often with my grandson’s about my experience there to share life lessons. One of my fondest subjects which still holds true today was History. Students of Randolph High School were bused as far as Seagrove, Piney Ridge, Stouts Chapel and Ramseur, though no one seemed to mind the extended ride and were anxious to attend Randolph School. Today, as I gaze just across my front yard at the building in shambles and ruin, I still reflect on fond memories of past tenure at Randolph High. In 1965, the school closed when integration began and the school was vacant for many years. Several years later, my brother Lewis White of Lafayette, CA, purchased the school. He too was a graduate of Randolph High and later became a successful businessman.”

Selena Shoffner-Alston has written: “I am a former graduate of Randolph High School, Liberty, N.C. As a matter of fact, my class, the class of 1965, was the last class to graduate from that facility. Although our school was newer than the white school and fully accredited, our students were bused downtown to a white school that was not as new as Randolph School nor was it accredited. We were never really told why our school closed. This was a sad time for everyone, students, teachers, and the black community. It was difficult graduating and leaving friends and even more difficult to leave our school that would soon be just another vacant building. I often wondered how many dreams were shattered during this time. Those were years long past but never forgotten. Our alumni still come together every two years to celebrate our years at Randolph High School. We still sing our alma mater, ‘Oh Randolph High, Oh Randolph

High, to you we sing'. Our school may have been closed to the public in 1965, but it could never be closed in our hearts. Oh Randolph High We Love You!"

The following is a listing of Principals who served at the Liberty/Randolph High School:

- White School Master, 1870- 1880
- E. E. Grant, 1931-1945, (laid foundation for the high school)
- Edward Jones, 1945-1956 (enrollment grew from 29 to 140 and total enrollment grew from 133 to 140)
- Joseph Bennett, 1956-1960
- F.A. Stafford, Jr. 1960-1962
- George Vincent 1962 -1965

#### **STATEMENT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Randolph High School meets Cultural Heritage Site criteria as it represents identification with the cultural and historic development of Randolph County and Liberty, N.C. Designation of Randolph High School as a Cultural Heritage Site will increase public awareness and appreciation for this site that has special meaning to the history and heritage of the community and Randolph County. The unique location of Randolph High School also represents an established and visual feature in Liberty, N.C. The Randolph High School was placed on the study list for preliminary assessment of the properties eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places on June 9, 2011, by the National Register Advisory Committee (NRAC), State Historic Preservation Office.