

# History, Building, and Design Study for Historic Preservation of Rosenwald Schools in Wake County, NC

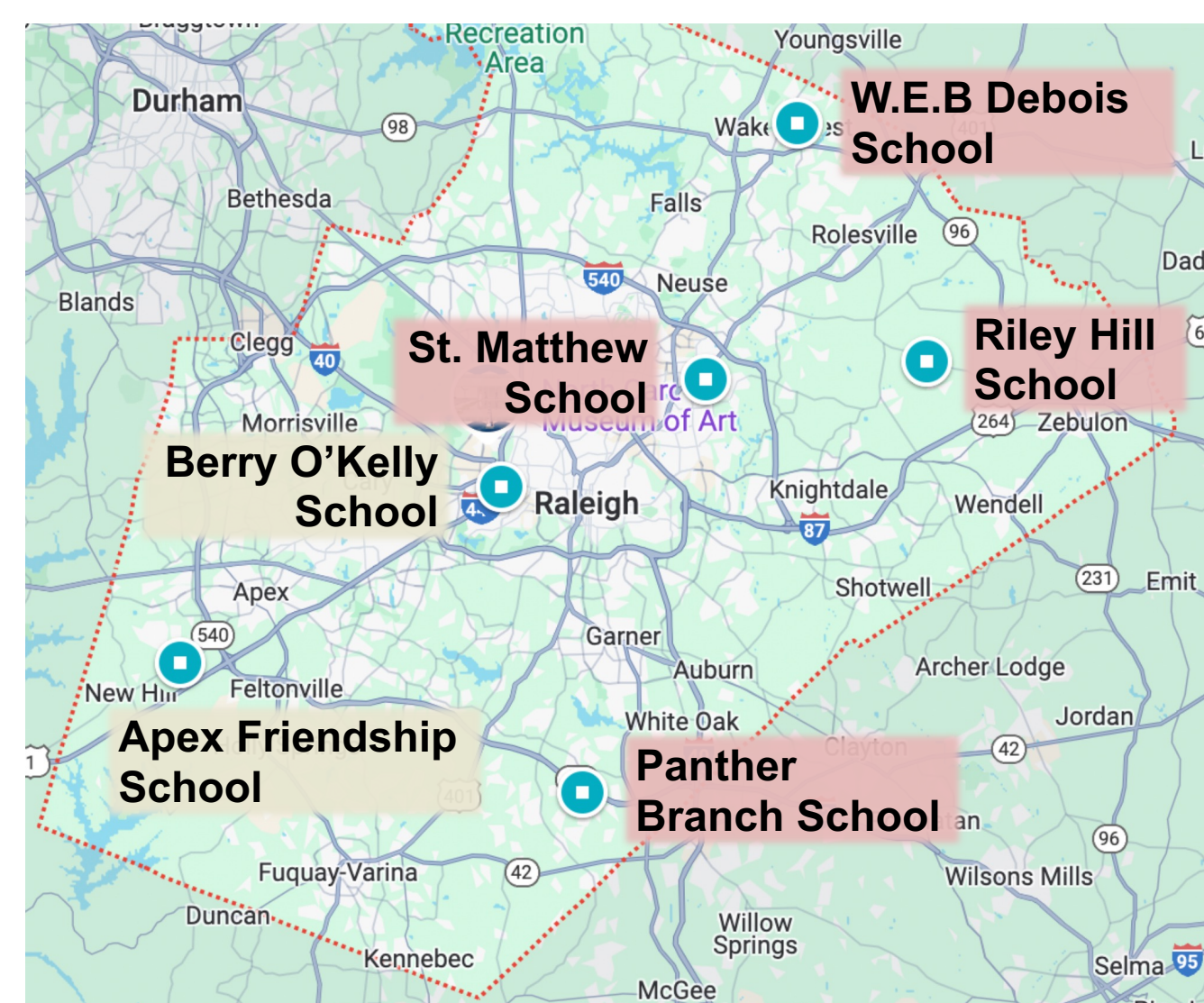
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to conduct a study of the original design, construction methods, and material selection of Rosenwald Schools built within historical black communities of Wake County, NC during the late 1910s to late 1920s. Rosenwald Schools are achieving a history of 100 years after they were built for African American children in the South. Out of the 813 schools that were constructed in NC, many of them have been destroyed. Within Wake County, there were twenty-one built, six existing, and four on the National Register of Historic Places. The research was conducted with Place-based methodology and findings were incorporated into a possible design approach to the historic preservation and rehabilitation of Rosenwald Schools.

### Location of Six Existing Rosenwald Schools in Wake County, NC



Existing & Listed in National Register of Historic Places  
Existing



Sketch of W.E.B. Dubois School in Wake Forest, NC, 1939

## INTRODUCTION

Wake County was one of the regions in North Carolina that received benefits from the Rosenwald Building Fund. The foundation was established with the collaboration of Sears, Roebuck, and Company's philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, the founder of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington, and MIT's first black architect, Robert Taylor. The fund provided floor plans, architectural specifications, and financial donations for the African American communities to construct schools for their children. In this research, the history of the communities and Rosenwald Schools in Wake County, NC as well as their building and design details were examined. The results were reflected in the preservation and rehabilitation project of re-purposing a two-story five-room Rosenwald School into a mixed-use and residential occupancy.

## METHOD

Place-based methodology was used to determine the history and culture of the African American communities in the area as well as existing schools and their building and interior features. Historic preservation methods of original building structure and design were investigated using the Standards for Rehabilitation. This information was compiled in a research paper that included figures, tables, and sketches, and a design approach was suggested for the preservation of Rosenwald School as a community engagement in its history.



Picture of Agricultural Building of The Berry O'Kelly School, date unknown<sup>1</sup>

## RESULTS

### African American Communities in Wake County

- Communities were made along with churches, schools, and homes<sup>2</sup>.
- Back in the 1920s, most African Americans worked in agriculture, construction, textiles, railroads, and manufacturing<sup>3</sup>.
- There were also owners of small businesses (grocery stores, beauty shops, and barbers) and elites (Businessmen and lawyers)<sup>3</sup>.

### Enhancement of Local Involvement in Education

- 40-50% of the funds were gathered from local churches, people, and school boards<sup>4</sup>.
- Materials, construction work, and lands were often donated by the communities<sup>4,5</sup>.
- Rosenwald Schools were also used as community social centers and adult education<sup>6</sup>.
- The school year was based on the agricultural calendar for the children to help their families.<sup>7</sup>

### Building and Design Characteristics<sup>4,6,7,8</sup>

- Building Style: Colonial Revival Style
- Foundation: Brick or concrete blocks
- Exterior walls: weatherboard or brick
- Ceiling: tongue-and-groove or board
- Windows: multiple windows were installed for daylight induction, including 4-over-4 to 9-over-9, and 4-panel sash windows above a chalkboard.
- Interior Features
  - 4' wainscoting in the hallway
  - Capped baseboards in classrooms
  - Movable partitions between classrooms
  - "Potbelly" stoves as a heat source in classrooms
- Color theory - Muted colors such as white walls, red brick, brown furniture

### Historic Preservation/Rehabilitation Standards<sup>9,10</sup>

- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation defines key directions of rehabilitation projects.
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) promotes and guides through historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties and listing of National Register of Historic Places.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

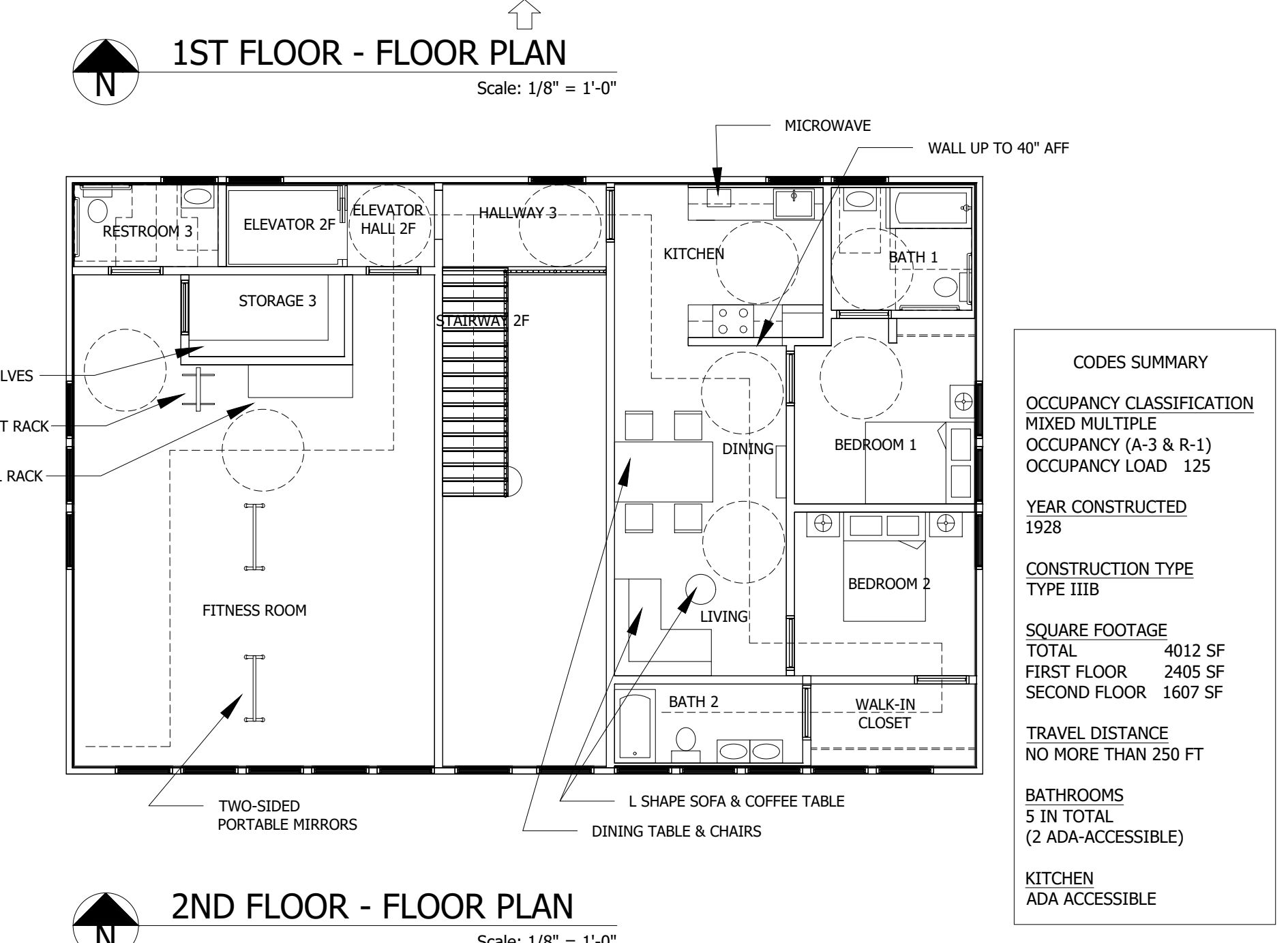
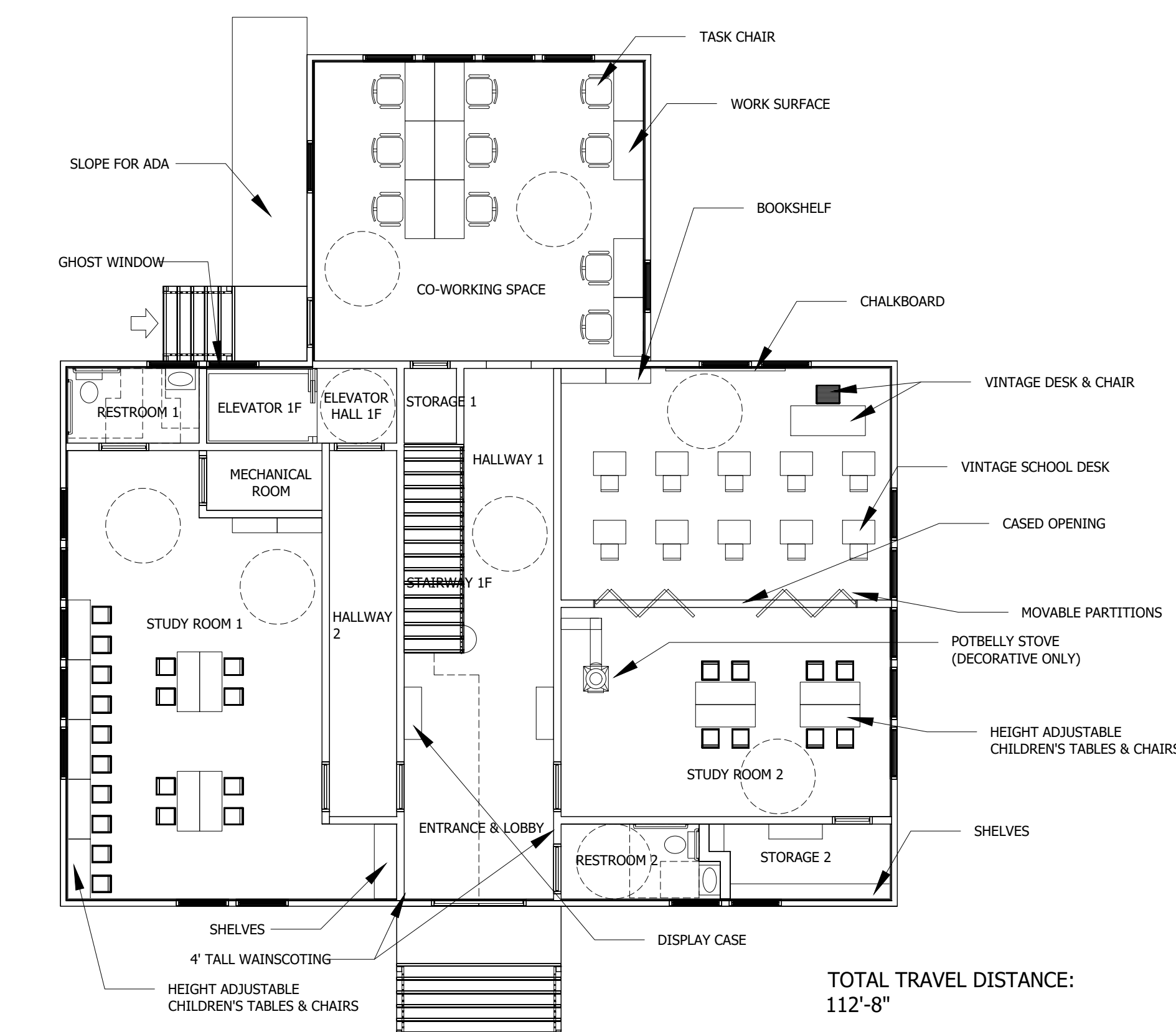
The research-based design is crucial for the adoptable reuse of existing buildings by means of historic preservation and rehabilitation, collaborating with SHPO. The research suggests design strategies for repurposing a two-story Rosenwald school building as a community space that provides two study rooms and a co-working space on the first floor, and a fitness room and an overnight guest lodging on the second floor. The design solutions are demonstrated in floor plans and interior perspectives incorporating 9-over-9 windows for daylight induction, capped baseboards in classrooms, a "potbelly" stove, movable partitions for class separation, as well as the use of muted colors such as brown and ivory. The original walls are retained, and some doors are altered for ADA accessibility for the new occupancy use. The study raises attention on the historical importance of Rosenwald Schools, and preserving and rehabilitating Rosenwald Schools means to keep the legacy and history of African American communities in the South.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CODES SUMMARY	
OCCUPANCY CLASSIFICATION	MIXED MULTIPLE
OCCUPANCY (A-3 & R-1)	OCCUPANCY LOAD: 125
YEAR CONSTRUCTED	1928
CONSTRUCTION TYPE	TYPE III-B
SQUARE FOOTAGE	TOTAL: 4912 SF
	FIRST FLOOR: 2405 SF
	SECOND FLOOR: 1607 SF
TRAVEL DISTANCE	NO MORE THAN 250 FT
BATHROOMS	5 IN TOTAL (2 ADA-ACCESSIBLE)
KITCHEN	ADA ACCESSIBLE



1ST FLOOR STUDY ROOM



1ST FLOOR STUDY ROOM



2ND FLOOR FITNESS ROOM



2ND FLOOR BEDROOM