

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 160 Ashwood School Road not for publication
city or town Bishopville vicinity X
state South Carolina code SC county Lee code 061 zip code 29010

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____
Elizabeth M. Johnson, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, S.C. Dept. of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C.
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
___ determined eligible for the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.		
___ determined not eligible for the National Register		
___ removed from the National Register		
___ other (explain):		

Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category: EDUCATION
RECREATION
RECREATION
SOCIAL

Subcategory: Schools
Auditorium
Sports Facility
Meeting Hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Category: RECREATION
SOCIAL

Subcategory: Sports Facility
Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL REVIVAL

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
WOOD
roof METAL
other WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- a owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- b removed from its original location.
- c a birthplace or a grave.
- d a cemetery.
- e a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- f a commemorative property.
- g less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1935-1946

Significant Dates

1938

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Goode Company, Charlotte, N.C.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Thomas Cooper Library, USC-Columbia
South Caroliniana Library, USC-Columbia

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing	Zone Easting Northing
1 <u>17 563006 3774113</u>	3 <u>17 _____</u>
2 <u>17 _____</u>	4 <u>17 _____</u>

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Almlie
 organization c/o South Carolina SHPO, Department of Archives & History date 29 April 2011
 street & number 8301 Parklane Road telephone 803-896-6179
 city or town Columbia state SC zip code 29223

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Lee County Board of Education
 street & number P.O. Box 507 – 521 Park Street telephone (803) 484-5391
 city or town Bishopville state South Carolina zip code 29010-0507

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). **Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium is situated south of Bishopville, South Carolina just off U.S. Highway 15 on Ashwood School Road near Ashwood Lake, all namesakes and products of the rural New Deal resettlement community of "Ashwood Plantation." The gymnasium/auditorium was completed in December of 1938 for a total cost of \$63,888.81 by the Goode Company of Charlotte, North Carolina, contracted by the Farm Security Administration.¹ The building's surroundings presently include some playground equipment, ball fields, and farmland. The foundations of the other buildings in the school complex remain and indicate the planned layout of a progressive and cohesive school community. The complex was constructed in 1938 and stood as a functioning school until the community moved some of the buildings and salvaged the rest of the materials in 1981. The concrete foundations of the other buildings are mostly filled with soil and dead plant matter, and grown over with trees and various kinds of vegetation. The concrete sidewalks in front of the high school buildings also remain along with some of the black and white checkered and multi-shaded green tile-work on three parts of the sidewalk. The school was designed to facilitate community and a practical education, with separate buildings for housing teachers and for home economics and shop being nearby. The rural surrounding community is made up of a few churches, a bar/store, small fire station, and scattered farms. The gymnasium/auditorium is a simplified and stripped Colonial Revival architectural style typical of New Deal-era economic restraint and its southern, rural environment.

The foundation of the gymnasium/auditorium is constructed of concrete. The brick walls are laid in common or American bond with a course of headers for every five courses of stretchers. The mortar joints feature concave or bucket-handle pointing. The main block of the building is two-stories in height and is capped with a linear hipped roof that extends forward to encompass a monumental hexastyle portico. The roof is sheathed in standing seam steel metal sheets with minimal eaves and wood fascia. Where the hipped roof joins together at the main roof ridge line is a small square wooden cupola with louvered vents and a metal-clad pyramidal roof, restored after 2001. There are one-story, one-bay wide by one-bay deep, lateral-gabled wings to either side near the front, and the main body, housing the gymnasium, extends in one-story shed-roofed or lean-to wings on either side where the bleachers come off the court for eight bays. The rear of the building, above and to the sides of the auditorium's stage, contains a slightly wider and higher profile. The main roof of this part of the building extends to either side beyond the width of the lean-to wings and is five bays deep. The main roof structure at the rear of the building also rises to a two-bay deep clerestory that serves as the superstructure for the auditorium's stage. A large graduated or multi-tiered square brick chimney rises from the southern slope of the clerestory roof. Two gabled wings extend beyond the rear of the building to either side.

¹ William David Hiott, "New Deal Resettlement in South Carolina," unpublished M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of South Carolina, 1986, 40.

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The front triple-bay main entrance is within the monumental portico, the floor of which is painted concrete with three steps on all three sides. The six slender, square piers are painted wood, as is the ceiling. The center portion of the façade is cast stone painted white, flanked by solid walls of brick. The five windows on the façade have cast stone sills and painted wood sashes; they are placed symmetrically with two single ones flanking the triple entrance doors, while the three on the second floor are paired. The first floor side windows are single-leaf, six-light casement while those on the upper level are double-leaf, six-light casement. There is also an eight-over-eight light, double-hung window on the fronts of either one-story lateral gabled wing. The entrance consists of three sets of metal double-leaf doors with four beveled square accents, in the middle of which are small glass panels, stacked vertically on each leaf. There is a slightly projecting cast stone surround with a shelf architrave.

The north and south side elevations are essentially identical. The front, one-story gable wings have German or novelty siding gable-ends with small ventilation openings and one window. All windows have painted wooden sashes and muntins, and painted cast stone sills. There are eight-over-eight double-hung windows on the wings. The two-by-four fixed windows are in single rows on the sides of the main building. The higher-level windows have wooden surrounds. The rear sections of the side elevations, which housed the central heat plant for the school complex, have painted wooden paired doors on both the north and south sides at ground level.

The tertiary rear elevation is brick with an unpainted concrete base. On the main section the brick continues up to the ridge of the gable roof. On the symmetrical wings, the gable ends are clad with German or novelty siding with ventilation openings, and twelve-over-eight double-hung windows on the facing interiors. Below those are openings on both sides for two-by-four pane windows that are currently boarded. There are large wood-plank cargo doors in the brick below a pulley [block and tackle] rigging on the main section for hoisting heavy objects to the stage area. On the exterior the wood planks are vertical, while on the interior they are angled. In the concrete base of the main section are metal basement doors below ground level with a brick architrave at center and concrete stairs built into the ground to access a basement.

Entering the gymnasium/auditorium, there is a small lobby the width of which conforms to the width of the triple door entry. The lobby is surrounded by wooden, simple vertical wainscoting. Windows on either side of the lobby reveal anterooms used presently for storage; however, historically, they were probably used for ticket sales and/or concession. The gymnasium is accessed from the lobby by three sets of double-leaf doors that contain six fixed glass panels. The interior of the gymnasium consists of a large arena or assembly space with a hardwood floor basketball court that is spanned by four steel I-beam trusses and two additional intersecting trusses for the hipped roof section at the

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front of the building. Walls are constructed of exposed finish brick. Painted court markings and a representation of the team's mascot, a ram, remain on the court floor. Retractable basketball goals with backboards are attached by metal pole hinges to the ceiling. Three ranks of wooden bleachers that are six levels deep recede from either side of the arena floor within the shed-roofed side wings. Two cut away aisles within the three ranks of bleachers provide for access stairs. The ceiling of the arena and wings is sheathed in acoustical tiles. Metal lamps are suspended from the trusses, three across each truss span. The clerestory walls are simple vertical board paneling and each window band features wood frames. At the far [west] end of the arena is a raised wooden stage that protrudes slightly into the arena floor space. The stage's front wall consists of thirteen large square, raised wooden panels. The stage's proscenium arch, rendered in cast stone, is square with a molded edge. The back wall of the stage, the interior of the rear wall of the building, is exposed finish brick. The large wood-plank loading dock stage door, with its chevron-patterned planks, is visible from the arena. There are two doors off the sides of the stage that lead to stairs accessing the basement and upper wings of the stage itself. These interior doors and walls are framed with vertical wood paneling. At the east end [front] of the building, two sets of stairs rise from the arena floor to a balcony above the tripartite entry where they access five rows of wooden theater seats. The railing to the balcony is circular steel piping. Under the stairs are doors with six-light upper panels that access the side entrance rooms. Doors to the restrooms are to the side of the stairs. There are two more doors off to either side, the left one to a storage room and the right to a remodeled kitchen.

The Ashwood Alumni Association has recently used grants to add a wheelchair accessible ramp to the left [south] of the portico to make the facility accessible to the whole community. It is concrete with brick coping and painted metal rails. It is compatible with the overall style and appearance of the building; it was added with little damage to the floor of the portico and could likewise as easily be removed, so does not detract from the integrity of the building. Since 2001 the owner has weatherproofed the building in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. Overall, the original building materials and the architecture of the gymnasium/auditorium are the same as when it was built, retaining excellent historic integrity.

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The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium, in the vicinity of Bishopville, the county seat of Lee County, South Carolina, was built in 1938 to serve Ashwood Plantation, the first Resettlement Administration (RA) project in South Carolina. It is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for the role it has played in politics and government and the social history of the Lee County community, and under Criterion C as an excellent and remarkably intact example of Resettlement Administration Architecture in South Carolina. It is the most significant and intact manifestation of the Ashwood resettlement project remaining in what was once a vibrant farming community. The Ashwood community was created by the New Deal resettlement program to convert defunct plantation or farm land into a self-sustaining community of independent farms with educational, agricultural, and commercial support facilities. The building served as the school and community gymnasium for athletics, dances, and community meetings and as an auditorium for dramatic performances and films, in a rural place in the time before television and mass media. As a part of the ambitious Ashwood project, the gymnasium/auditorium served an important role in the Resettlement Administration and New Deal's goals to improve the health and education of the poorer classes, especially that of Southern tenant farmers. The simplified Colonial Revival architecture reflects a style that was popular nationwide in the 1930s, especially in government-sponsored construction, but also the economic situation of the era and the rural Southern character of its surroundings.

Politics and Government

The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium is the most significant and intact resource remaining from Ashwood Plantation, the largest of the three rural resettlement tracts in New Deal-era South Carolina. Each resettlement tract included community buildings such as administrative offices, cotton gins, a store, and gas stations. A few other buildings or structures associated with Ashwood Plantation, such as farmhouses, a corner store, and a water tower, are extant, but have lost integrity of materials and design. The school is no longer extant, and the school gymnasium and auditorium retains its integrity of materials, design, setting, feeling, and association as a significant public building serving the resettlement community from 1938 to 1944 under federal supervision and serving the Ashwood community since.

At Ashwood Plantation, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) dammed nearby McGrits Creek, creating Ashwood Lake, with a small lakeshore park for residents of the resettlement community. The lake and park are down Ashwood School Road a short distance from the gymnasium and auditorium, and are managed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.²

² South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Managed Lands, "Ashwood Lake," https://www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/managedland?p_id=80, accessed 22 February 2001.

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Social History

The rural resettlement program of the Resettlement Administration was an ambitious but unsuccessful New Deal project, especially in terms of its impact on the very society and economy it was intended to aid. The families that were forced to move to resettlement farms such as Ashwood Plantation had great difficulty adjusting to life away from their extended families and away from their familiar established social networks. The farms themselves were small, and most farmers struggled to make a profit or even a basic living. By the time the federal government ceased supervising Ashwood as a resettlement community under the Resettlement Administration in 1944, several families there had already purchased their homes and farms. Others moved away, allowing non-resettlement farmers to move into the community. Eventually, farmers began consolidating small farms in an effort to make a profit, or sold land to corporate farms.³

Of the six resettlement projects in the state, two focused on scattered sites and individual farm resettlement. Three others—Orangeburg Farms, Allendale Farms, and Tiverton Farms—were established later than Ashwood Plantation, were not as large as Ashwood, and were not as successful as Ashwood. The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium is both the most significant and the most intact resource associated with the rural resettlement program of the Resettlement Administration in South Carolina.

Architecture

The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium was built in the Colonial Revival style, but its forms and details are greatly simplified — even stripped of most decoration — and the structure is economical in its use of materials and functional space. The Colonial Revival style of architecture is one of the most enduring in America, and in the 1930s its popularity among architects and the public as a whole was greatly magnified as the nation watched John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. In relation to the ethics of architecture, the Colonial Revival was used as an expression of simplicity and honesty.⁴

Those were qualities the nation wanted to be reminded of as the financial and environmental stability of the country disintegrated after the 1920s, often typified as a decade of flamboyant excess. Modern architecture was characterized by its simplified lines and reliance on form, “excessive ornamentation was seen to be unnecessary and a detraction from the aesthetic values of a building.”⁵ Both economic restraints, an ethic of honesty, and modern trends affected the expression

³ Jack Irby Hayes, Jr., *South Carolina and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 133-34; Sammy Way, “Ashwood was 1st Rural Organized Community,” *The Item* (Sumter, S.C.), 25 July 2010.

⁴ David Gebhard, “The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 22 (Summer-Autumn 1987), 109-148.

⁵ Robert M. Craig, *Atlanta Architecture: Art Deco to Modern Classic, 1929-1959* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1995), 121.

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of the Colonial Revival in the 1930s and for the Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium as a part of a government community. The Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium almost perfectly matches David Gebhard's description of 1930s Colonial Revival "public buildings, churches, and educational buildings." According to Gebhard, "the characteristic design was a red brick structure whose façade presented a balanced composition, accentuated usually by small pane windows, central ornamented entrances, and the roof surmounted by a cupola."⁶ Ashwood's gymnasium/auditorium has the classical form of columns and a pediment, though they are created by simple, square beams and a hipped roof; it is likewise symmetrical with a small schoolhouse cupola. The exterior façade presents quite a monumental and impressive, but balanced building. Its interior spaces, and set-up as both gymnasium and auditorium, make the building's structural form closely reliant upon the building's intended uses. All interior space has a functional use as a court, seating, stage, preparation and storage rooms, and space above the entrance was utilized for audience seating.

Additional Information

The Resettlement Program Nationwide

The New Deal resettlement program nationally served as a grand social experiment in the alleviation of rural poverty. Through the clean slate of new community, it promoted innovation in theories of agriculture, education, and social welfare. The Ashwood School—classroom buildings, home economics/shop, and teacherage—were built in 1938 as an integral part of the community goals.

This gymnasium/auditorium is one of the last and most historically intact community buildings of New Deal resettlement programs in South Carolina. It served Ashwood Plantation as a place for education, health, entertainment, and community. It has maintained its historic appearance, as well as its meaning to that community for seventy years and deserves recognition by the National Register of Historic Places.

As a program of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) built 128 farmsteads, outbuildings, and agricultural support and community facilities at Ashwood for families, or "clients," from all over South Carolina who were relocated there. In the 1930s, when American agriculture and finances had faltered under natural crises and risky credit practices, the federal government stepped in to experiment with social programs to improve the economic situation. In 1935, the federal government bought the land at Ashwood and began construction; federal involvement ended with turning over management of the project to the county in 1946. The farms themselves were small, and most farmers struggled to make a profit or even a basic living. By the time the federal government ceased supervising Ashwood as a resettlement community under the Resettlement Administration in 1944, several families there had already

⁶ Gebhard, "American Colonial Revival," 142.

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purchased their homes and farms. Others moved away, allowing non-resettlement farmers to move into the community. Eventually, farmers began consolidating small farms in an effort to make a profit, or sold land to corporate farms.⁷

Many New Deal programs provided aid for agricultural areas; the government provided rehabilitation loans, regulated crop production, and also relocated failing farmers. Resettlement as a practice was only moderately successful in the few projects that were attempted. It was an expensive endeavor and many variables affected the ability of clients to become self-sufficient. Resettlement, however, was an important expansion of federal involvement, especially in the South. In 1935, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, both of which had been practicing resettlement to some extent since 1932, transferred that work to the new Resettlement Administration under the directorship of Rexford Tugwell. The demand for resettlement communities was high. Between its creation in April of 1935 and the following August, the RA received 500 suggestions for projects from their regional offices nationwide, in addition to almost three times that from unsolicited sources. In April 1936, one year into the RA's work, their interim report indicated that twenty of the fifty eight projects with final approval were already under construction—including Ashwood Plantation.⁸ In 1937, the Bankhead-Jones Act brought the resettlement program under the newly created Farm Security Administration (FSA), headed by Will Alexander. To administer the program, state and regional divisions were established. By 1942, with any success difficult to quantify and the war effort underway, the government began planning for the liquidation of the expensive program. The number of communities that were finished is difficult to determine. By 1946-47, the FSA had turned over most of the projects to local governments.⁹

Around the country, resettlement sought to make farmers self-sustainable by taking them off overworked land, and placing them on land the government had found, bought, and prepared for farmsteads. The goal was to have productive farms as quickly as possible so that loans could be paid and the program could expand.¹⁰ The community projects themselves were designed to be self-sustainable; most were located near established cities, transportation routes, and infrastructure.

Families were chosen from relief rolls largely based on their likelihood to succeed. The government looked for families with experience on farms as well as a willingness to accept Resettlement Administration supervision. They then built schools, cotton gins, stores, filling stations, social halls, gristmills, and canneries among other community buildings. Farming families were provided with

⁷ Jack Irby Hayes, Jr., *South Carolina and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 133-34; Sammy Way, "Ashwood was 1st Rural Organized Community," *The Item* (Sumter, S.C.), 25 July 2010.

⁸ *Interim Report of the Resettlement Administration* (Washington D.C.: GPO, April 1936.)

⁹ Marion Clawson, "Resettlement Experience in Nine Selected Resettlement Project," *Agricultural History* 52 (January 1978), 15.

¹⁰ Brian Q. Cannon, "Keeping Their Instructions Straight: Implementing the Rural Resettlement Program in the West." *Agricultural History* 70 (Spring 1996), 251.

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homes, barns, outhouses, wells, some livestock, seed, fertilizer, and access to loans for capital. Each project location had a manager, assistant managers, and other administrative staff to supervise crop production as well as promote health and education. Farm managers reviewed the budgets of the farmsteads, encouraged crop diversification, and established cooperative efforts to process crops. Home managers interacted with wives in the community to promote food crop gardening, canning, budgeting, and other best practices. Working with state and local officials, the federal government created and monitored whole communities. The clean-slate nature of these communities gave administrators and specialists ample room to test theories of social welfare and betterment.

The Resettlement Program in South Carolina

As the 1930s approached, the South as a region became a high priority for the federal government's programs to alleviate poverty. For the South, the Depression had begun in the 1920s before the stock market crash, when cotton crops suffered under poor weather conditions, overproduction, and boll weevil infestation. Sharecropping provided labor for former plantations and farms and was seen as one of the most widespread and self-perpetuating forms of poverty in the country. South Carolina had the fourth highest tenancy rate in the country.¹¹ Tenancy was seen to contribute greatly to broader social problems of education and health. In 1925, an observer from the University of South Carolina wrote an evaluation of the condition of Lee County, defining illiteracy as "the inability to write one's name in any language," noting statistics of black residents as well as poor whites, "In this respect, Lee holds the same relative position among the counties as South Carolina holds among the United States, i.e., next to the bottom."¹² The federal government hoped that their New Deal programs would help to break the system of tenancy.

In the Jim Crow South, the state-level program administrators and local whites in towns near the intended communities often worked against the federal efforts to aid poor blacks through resettlement. Most evaluations of the resettlement program indicate that the respective percentages of FSA clients were fairly even racially, but that blacks were a larger proportion of the total number of poor farmers—meaning that whites were favored in terms of percentage. The FSA established regional offices, in part, to balance local prejudice, especially in granting loans. National administrators generally had progressive ideas on race for that time, the Secretary of State and the director of the FSA having had worked previously with the NAACP, but Will Alexander and the Farm Security Administration never challenged segregation.¹³

¹¹ Hiott, "New Deal Resettlement," 2.

¹² A.W. Dick, G.R. McElveen, and Lawrence M. Peebles, "Lee County, Economic and Social," *Bulletin of the University of South Carolina* 156 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1 February 1925), 21.

¹³ Robert E. Nipp, "The Negro in the New Deal Resettlement Program: A Comment," *Agricultural History* 45 (July 1971), 199.

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Ashwood Plantation was a white community; others in South Carolina were designated for blacks. The resettlement program did not break the status quo because they needed Southern Congressmen to vote for funding approval.¹⁴ In the South especially, the ability to address the practical poverty of as many blacks and whites as possible, meant that white objections were mitigated by creating separate communities and leaving most of the leading administrative positions to whites.

New Deal programs in the South purposefully worked to defeat tenancy, and largely succeeded. The influx of federal money in the form of loans superseded the former relationship between tenants (often black) and landowners (almost always white). The federal government "was a fairer and more dependable source of dignified work and life's necessities than the old master class."¹⁵ Resettlement not only sought to establish former tenants as independent landowners, but created communities of support, resources, and education. Poor white tenants, while slightly better off socially than their black counterparts, also operated economically under a manipulative planter class. In an early news article, as the government began buying land for Ashwood, it was explained that "In other words, the government is trying to improve rural conditions by enabling honest and industrious people who are without means to own their own land."¹⁶ In alleviating tenancy, the federal government helped create Americans out of South Carolinians and Southerners by giving whites and blacks a direct connection to the federal government.¹⁷

In South Carolina, six resettlement communities were constructed. The first was Ashwood Plantation, a large white community, which will be discussed in depth later. Then came Orangeburg Farms, ideas for which began in 1934, but the project stalled until September 1936 because the neighboring population opposed this black resettlement community, which originally was designed for anywhere from 100-200 units, but was completed with only eighty.¹⁸ A compromise was reached, and Orangeburg Farms was built with a belt of more than twenty white client farms providing a buffer between black clients and those in the neighboring areas. The plans for another black resettlement community, Allendale Farms, were approved in December 1938. In 1940-41, in Sumter County, the twenty-nine units of Tiverton Farms, the last black community, were completed under Orangeburg management. South Carolina also had two more projects, the Farm Tenant Security and the Scattered Farms Project, which settled individual farmsteads across the state. Six other communities were imagined, some even begun, but they all either ran out of support or out of money.¹⁹ As a white project, Ashwood received slightly better homes and a community school that was good enough to serve the entire area when schools consolidated in the 1950s. Though the school was closed in

¹⁴ Mertz, *New Deal Policy*, 109.

¹⁵ Jack Temple Kirby, "Black and White in the Rural South, 1915-1954," *Agricultural History* 58 (July 1984), 422.

¹⁶ *Lee County Messenger* (Bishopville, S.C.), 25 October 1934.

¹⁷ Jack Irby Hayes, Jr., *South Carolina and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁸ Hiott, "New Deal Resettlement," 71.

¹⁹ The other six that were not completed were called Coastal Cooperative Farms, LaFrance Homesteads, Greenville Homesteads, Saluda Farms/Garden Homes, Spartanburg Farms, and Ware Shoals Homesteads. Hiott, *New Deal*, 5-8.

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1980, it is still a relatively cohesive community of people. School reunions still take the time to recognize the few surviving “project children” who came in with their families or were born at Ashwood while it was managed by the federal government.

The Origin of the Ashwood Plantation Project

In April 1936, the Resettlement Administration’s (RA) Interim Report listed Ashwood Plantation as one of the first twenty projects to have begun construction. At that time, a field office had been established and they expected the project to be complete by August 31 of that same year.²⁰ In fact, Ashwood had originally begun as a project of the earlier Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Selected applicants moved to Ashwood before the houses had even been built and stayed in former tenant shacks.²¹ Ashwood clients used government loans to grow cotton, beans, and tobacco, and many worked side jobs as well in construction or carpentry.²²

Before FERA bought the land, Ashwood was comprised of three former plantations: Rose Hill, Manning, and Hammett Plantations, and their many tenants.²³ Black tenants from those former plantations were put on relief, resettled, or left to their own resources.²⁴

The Ashwood Plantation project, however, was not without problems. The program also sought to create small independent farmers, an agrarian ideal, when national trends were moving toward large commercial farms. Across the region, the small allotments of acreage were seen as a disability for self-sustainability, barely enough space to turn a mule around in, let alone the new tractors that began to appear. Determining success based on clients’ records was difficult; the records were often unreliable because clients often were found to be ignorant, neglectful, or apathetic about keeping good records. The program nationwide only helped a few select farmers and left out thousands of others, but its goal was to promote self-sustainability— quality, not quantity— other rehabilitation and work relief programs sought to help in large numbers.²⁵ Ashwood was an experiment, a New Deal project, with limitations, but its implementation was a manifestation in South Carolina during a significant time in American history.

Despite early criticism, construction at Ashwood proceeded as planned. Houses were built in sections based on former plantation boundaries, and styles changed slightly with each phase. Section A houses had shingled roofs, whereas Sections B and E had metal sheet roofs and were slightly larger. All houses had three to five rooms, a barn, chicken house, pig sty, and water pump. Families were

²⁰ *Interim Report of the Resettlement Administration.*

²¹ Hiott, “New Deal Resettlement,” 20.

²² Author’s conversations with former Ashwood students, 8 November 2008.

²³ Hiott, “New Deal Resettlement,” 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁵ Nipp, “The Negro in the New Deal,” 195.

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provided with a mule, two cows, two sows, chickens, fertilizer, seed and stock feed.²⁶ By 1940, it was reported that there was cotton, tobacco, oats, wheat, hay, corn, sweet potatoes, asparagus, and other garden vegetables being grown.²⁷ The federal government also built the Ashwood Plantation community administrative offices, a community manager residence, cotton gins, store and filling station, and a dam to create Ashwood Lake for recreation. The FSA sought to create a community that would address shortcomings of rural society, not just individual poverty.²⁸

The Ashwood School

The largest complex in the Ashwood community to support and educate the newly independent farmers was the school. Before Ashwood Plantation, the few children in the area went to the old Fairview School. The children of the project families that came in first met in the old school building, and the first class to be graduated from the new school building came in 1939. The old Manning plantation house was used as a teacherage and library. The Manning house was the only building from the plantations that the FSA decided to let stand for its "before the war architecture," until it burned down in 1938, and a new one was built in its place.²⁹ One of the *Lee County Messenger's* "Ashwood News" section held the comment that "it seems as though our community will have one of the largest rural school buildings in the state," a source of pride for the new residents.³⁰

The new school, built and subsidized by the FSA, had three classroom buildings, an office, shop, health building, a gymnasium/auditorium, a baseball diamond, playground, and 400 new pupils by 1941. They had teachers of agriculture, home economics, manual training, music, and commerce. The creation of a new school provided an exceptional opportunity for practicing and evaluating new educational theories. From 1938 to 1941, as the school and the community became established, representatives from the FSA, the State Department of Education, Winthrop College, the University of South Carolina (USC), and Clemson College worked together to develop an educational program to transition from traditional to progressive practices. In writing the educational program report in 1941, USC education student Fred William Shore characterized the community's relationship to the educational system they needed by saying:

In doing so, I want to stress the fact that this community is strictly rural in nature; and I also state that the people living there were, just a few years ago, tenant farmers living in various rural sections of this state. Now, through the Farm Security Administration, these families have their own farm and home, with furniture, farm equipment, operating capital, etc. Another fact that I wish to stress is that the percentage of high school graduates in this community

²⁶ Hiott, "New Deal Resettlement," 20-21; *Lee County, South Carolina: Past and Present*. (Bishopville, SC: Lee County Chamber of Commerce, 1992), 38.

²⁷ *Lee County, South Carolina: Past and Present*, 39.

²⁸ Fred William Shore, "An Educational Program for Ashwood School," M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1941, 5.

²⁹ *Lee County Messenger* (Bishopville, S.C.), 25 October 1934, 15 September 1938.

³⁰ *Lee County Messenger* (Bishopville, S.C.), 24 March 1938.

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who attend college is very small, less than ten percent. It is evident, then, that the community school must give the boy or girl the kind of training that will prepare him or her for the kind of work which he or she will do in life; and the community school must also prepare these boys and girls for good citizenship.³¹

Ashwood also expanded its educational mission to its entire community. Their goals were to teach scientific agricultural farming, home-making, community planning, health, and cooperative efforts to the entire community. They evaluated how to reach preschool age children, school age (6-17), out-of-school age (17-21), and adults through educational programs, community organizations, and project staff.³² This broad approach was seen as very liberal and groundbreaking for the time and for the region.

The school, as a whole, cost \$260,000.³³ There were three classroom buildings for high school and grammar school, administrative offices, a building for home economics and shop, a health building, and a teacherage. The gymnasium/auditorium was a central feature of the school complex and this new program of health, education, and community. Bids for the construction of the Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium opened January 26, 1938, from the FSA regional office in Montgomery, Alabama, for a one-story, brick and frame structure of about 342,000 cubic feet. The Goode Company of Charlotte, North Carolina, won the bid; the final inspection was on September 26, 1938, and repairs were completed December 22, 1938, for a total cost of \$63,888.81.³⁴ The building sits two-stories high, alone across the road from the other classroom buildings which are situated in an arch facing the gym. Its appearance is a fine example of Colonial Revival Depression-era rural American architecture. Brick, wood, and concrete [cast stone], largely unadorned, the gym is simple and economically conservative, but with a monumental portico fitting with Southern rural heritage.

Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium as a Space for Community Life

The gymnasium/auditorium building has a large arena with a basketball court and hoops. Above the entrance lobby is a balcony of theater seats, and there are bleachers off the wings and a stage on the far end of the arena. These key architectural features speak to its importance as a flexible social space for games, performances, and other community uses.

In a county history, an alumnus wrote, "Ashwood is a close-knit community. During it's heyday many social activities centered around the gym and home economics/social building, such as basketball games, meetings, recitals, programs, bridal showers and parties."³⁵ The gymnasium/auditorium also provided a large space for games and events to promote health, to have folk dances, to have

³¹ Shore, "An Educational Program," 14.

³² Shore, "An Educational Program."

³³ *Lee County, South Carolina: Past and Present*, 39.

³⁴ Hiott, "New Deal Resettlement," 40.

³⁵ *Lee County, South Carolina: Past and Present*, 39.

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dramatics, to show entertaining and educational films, and to gather as a community. Basketball games were incredibly important to the community for sports and entertainment in the days before television. Having an indoor court was a source of pride for students, as other teams occasionally used it for practice and the school hosted almost every tournament in the county for many years.³⁶ The large space was also ideal for Harvest Festivals, Halloween activities, and May Days. In 1939, the May Day festivities of National Children's Health Week at the school and gymnasium were recorded by FSA photographer Marion Post Wolcott. The festival included sporting events, dances, and pageantry, all recorded to promote the success of the resettlement communities. In 1952, nearby Central (in Bishopville) and Mayesville schools were consolidated and sent to the renamed Ashwood-Central school. In 1981, the school closed and a square dancing group, the "Cotton County Cut-Ups," used the gym for a time, then, though owned by the county Board of Education, the Lee County Parks and Recreation took a long term lease on the property. Since 1981, all the other school buildings have been taken down, moved, and sold off for salvage. The school's alumni association, which still holds reunions in the gym, has spent several years securing grant money for its restoration and has worked with the State Historic Preservation Office to do basic weatherproofing to protect the building.

Conclusion

For the state of South Carolina, the New Deal resettlement programs of the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration helped connect the state to the federal government and to transition Southern agricultural practice away from tenancy. The programs were predecessors in theory and in practice to the government's social programs for health, education, and welfare in the 1960s and beyond. The current US Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program developed out of the Resettlement Administration, the Rural Electrification Administration, and Farmers Home Administration.³⁷ Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium still stands as one of the last intact buildings from any South Carolina resettlement community. Its simplified Colonial Revival architecture is typical of the popular 1930s style and its rural Southern surroundings. The gymnasium/auditorium was a multi-functional space in which the community could gather then and continues to be an important place for the community now. In the 1930s, the federal government created the Ashwood Plantation project out of defunct plantation lands. They built homes, community buildings, industrial facilities, and a school for a community that became much more than a federal experiment.

³⁶ Author's conversations with former Ashwood students, 8 November 2008.

³⁷ "70 Years of Commitment to Rural America: A History of Rural Development Programs."
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/70th/legacy.html> .

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the black line on the accompanying portion of Lee County Tax Map 50-00, Parcel 050-240, dated 2006 (with an original scale of 1" = 400' but reproduced at a scale of 1" = 200'), delineating a portion of the parcel owned by the Lee County Board of Education, with the black line of the National Register boundary restricted to the Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium and its immediate setting.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property is restricted to the Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium and its immediate setting, excluding the remainder of the parcel owned by the Lee County Board of Education.

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The following information is the same for each of the photographs:

Name of Property: Ashwood School Gymnasium and Auditorium
Location of Property: Bishopville vicinity, Lee County, South Carolina

Name of Photographer: Liz Almlie
Date of Photographs: September 26, 2008
Location of Original Digital
Images: South Carolina Department of Archives and History,
Columbia, S.C.

1. Facade and left elevation, oblique view, facing west and north
2. Facade, facing west
3. Left elevation, facing north
4. Rear elevation, facing east
5. Historic Photo, FSA-OWI, Marion Post Wolcott, 1939, facing west and north
6. Interior, facing east toward the rear
7. Interior, facing west toward the entrance
8. Painted image of school mascot on the gymnasium floor