

Russell Grove Alumni  
Association, Inc.

Presents

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**Learning  
from  
our  
rich  
history**

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Premiere Exhibit  
"THE EARLY YEARS"  
Sunday, February 29, 2004

Russell Grove Museum  
8701 Otterburn Road, Suite 103

Russell Grove Alumni Association, Inc.  
8701 Otterburn Road, Suite 103  
Amelia, Virginia 23002

EXHIBIT I

THE RUSSELL GROVE PROJECT

Early in June, 2001, Governor Jim Gilmore handed out an oversized check in the amount of \$900,000 to Philip Vannoorbeeck, county administrator and Russell Grove alumnus, Holcomb Thompson, during an official ceremony in South Hill on Monday June 25, 2001.

The Russell Grove Community Project was designed to renovate the Russell Grove School building and provide water and sewer services to the homes in the Russell Grove community. The county provided nearly \$314,935 of the \$1,792,270 Community Development Block Grant.

In further cooperation with the county serves the broader Russell Grove Community. The doors of the Russell Grove building were re-opened in August 2003. The RGAA continues its fundraising efforts to support the development of a museum and provide educational programs.

This exhibit shows the people and

phases involved in development of this project. It's completion is a celebration of a rich legacy in academic excellence.



(l-r) County Administrator Philip Vannoorbeeck, District 5 Supervisor Frank Harris and Holcomb Thompson show off the check representing a \$900,000 Community Development Block Grant.



The newly renovated Russell Grove Building opened to alumni during the 2003 Reunion.



## Our rich History

The church played a major role in helping to educate and provide schools for Negroes in Amelia County.

During the Civil War, Samantha Jane Neil, a white Presbyterian woman came to Amelia looking for her lost Union Army officer husband on a Virginia battlefield. Instead, she found her life's work as an educator and began ministering to Negroes and establishing churches in Amelia and Nottoway counties.

From this foundation of black Presbyterian church work, many schools and churches have come. In most cases, the churches were organized and the schools grew out of them. Six were organized as a result of Mrs. Neil's work. They were Allen Memorial, Albright, Big Oak, Oak Grove, Mount Herman and Russell Grove.

Under a spreading oak tree near Russell Grove Presbyterian Church, she began teaching her first class of black students. Mrs. Neil trained two assistants, Nuna Booker and Mrs. Crawley, both from Amelia, to help her. Parents and patrons did much to provide education for their children as well. They would buy the land, construct the buildings and usually came up with 1/2 to 1/3 of the money needed for materials in the building.

These early teachers worked under many difficulties. Transportation was poor. Teachers



Russell Grove Alumni Association received its charter in 1988.

walked one to five miles to work. Lack of communication in bad weather. School started in October and ended in February. Heating and lighting were crude, and salaries were low, ranging from \$15 to \$50 dollars per month. For nearly 20 years the curriculum centered around reading. Russell Grove graduated its first class in 1937 consisting of 10 boys and 16 girls. The progress continued with a five-room home economics cottage, school accreditation, expanded curriculum, increasing faculty and enrollment. Parents provided transportation at their own expense. More land was purchased in the 40s, and modern expansions in the 50s included a library, science labs, a teacher's lounge, hallways with individual lockers and more. For years, these accomplishments continued to enrich the lives of black families throughout the county. In 1969, integration brought an end to the Russell Grove School legacy as the institution for educating black Amelians. *For more on the history and growth of Russell Grove, see museum guide*

### EXHIBIT 2

## THE EARLY YEARS

The Early Years exhibit revisits the two-story schoolhouse chapel that preceded the Russell Grove building and documents its growth and the experiences of members of the first and second graduating class. Various artifacts, memorabilia and photographs help relive the rich history of Russell Grove.



### EXHIBIT 3

## THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

Melvin W. Grimes spent many years as chief administrator of the Russell Grove School and shares stories of its struggles and "firsts" in an enlightening video interview, administrative documents and photographs.



### EXHIBIT 4

## RUSSELL GROVE MEMORABILIA

Experience the excitement of Russell Grove as you examine the pictorial views from class pictures, sports memorabilia, "The Voice," yearbooks and more. During the sixties Russell Grove Falcons celebrated the State Baseball Championship for the first and only time in the school's history. The winning ball shows signatures of the winning teammates. There even a baseball glove from the early years.



## Museum Exhibit Response Form

Briefly describe your experience visiting this exhibit:

Do you have any ideas for future exhibits?

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Do you have any Russell Grove memorabilia?

Yes  No

Would you like to donate or bequeath items for future exhibits?  Yes  No

What items do you have?

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How may we reach you?

Name

Address

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Phone No:

