

HISTORIC MARKER PROGRAM

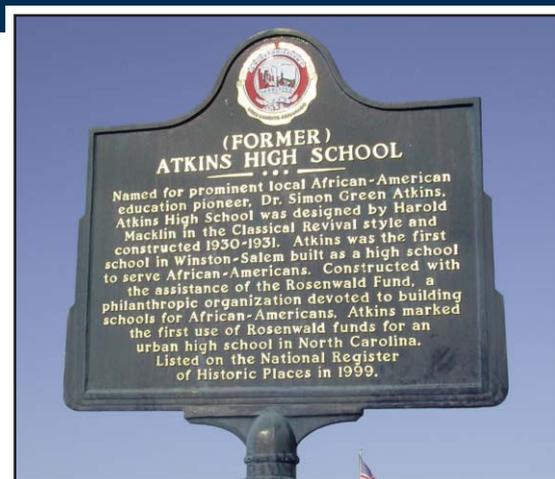
Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

(Former) Atkins High School

1215 N. Cameron Avenue

The former Atkins High School, constructed in 1930-1931, is of statewide significance in the areas of education, black ethnic heritage, and architecture due to its important role in the development of African-American education in North Carolina during the first half of the 20th century. Equally important architecturally, it was a state-of-the-art school facility, “the first modern high school for Negroes” in Winston-Salem. Winston, and later Winston-Salem, stood as early forerunners in the field of African-American education in North Carolina. The *New England Journal of Education* praised the City’s work in 1885, calling it the most notable among Southern towns.

Atkins High School symbolizes local and national philanthropic efforts to improve education for African-Americans. Of significance also is Atkins’ place as an experiment of the Rosenwald Fund, which supported



construction of schools to educate African-Americans in the early 20th 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 program originated in 1912 from efforts of the African-American educator Booker T. Washington and his staff at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington sought to improve education for black children in the rural South by creating partnerships between black communities and philanthropists. Washington’s concept was realized through the Rosenwald Fund. The benefactor was Julius Rosenwald, who grew up poor, but was to become the president of Sears Roebuck and Company. He was a proponent of improving black education, a trustee of Tuskegee Institute, and an admirer of Booker T. Washington. Up until the time of Atkins’ construction, the Rosenwald Fund had only supported the erection of schools for African-American children living in rural parts of the South. The construction of Atkins High School in 1930 and 1931 marked the first use of Rosenwald Funds for an urban high school in North Carolina.



Courtesy of Forsyth County
Public Library Photograph Collection

Atkins was also a departure from the Fund’s traditional philosophy of training black students for success in “Negro jobs.” The school was the result of a recognition that, as the South became industrialized, African-Americans could advance only if they learned the proper skills. Therefore, Atkins offered instruction in such areas as printing, the building trades, dressmaking, and millinery. Significantly, academic subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, and sciences that served as college preparatory work were an important part of the curriculum as well. Atkins was noted for its comprehensiveness in a variety of vocational training and academic preparation programs.



Architecturally, Atkins High School was a “modern” design, the first building in Winston-Salem with steel frame construction and unit ventilation. The building was designed in 1930 by local architect Harold Macklin, working with a consulting architect for the Rosenwald Fund, and is a fine example of the institutional Classical Revival style. The school was named for local African-American educational pioneer Simon Green Atkins, and the building

has been used as a school continuously for over three-quarters of a century. Today the school serves as the site of the Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy, a magnet school whose mission is to prepare every student for college.

In 1999, Atkins High School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?
Atkins High School National Register Nomination
Winston-Salem’s New High School



This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission’s web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>