

Professor Thomas Jefferson Elder: His Legacy Lives On



- In 1889, Professor Thomas Jefferson Elder (1869-1946) founded Sandersville High and Industrial School, later renamed Thomas Jefferson Elder (T. J. Elder) High and Industrial School.
- Born and reared in Watkinsville, Georgia, Professor Elder came to Sandersville around 1887, after finishing Atlanta University.
- He brought his wife and fellow teacher, Lillian Phinizy Elder (1868-1943) of Athens, Georgia, a graduate of Spelman Seminary.
- They had four children; Lizzie Blanch Elder (Purnell), Charles Spurgeon Elder, Dr. Alfonso "Toby" Elder, and Thomas J. Elder.
- For almost 60 years, he was influential in the educational, social, and spiritual advancement of the African American people of Washington County.
- Professor and Mrs. Elder are buried on the site of the former school, currently home to the T. J. Elder Community Center.

T. J. Elder Community Center
316 Hall Street
Sandersville, Georgia 31082

T. J. Elder High and Industrial School

- It was built as an authentic Rosenwald Plan school and is the oldest school building remaining in Washington County.
- As early as 1913, it was designated as a County Training School for teachers, one of two in the state.
- It became the largest African American school in the central rural section of the state, averaging over 300 students per term.
- The school included a manual arts building and dormitories for children from nearby farms to reside in during the school year.
- First school in rural central Georgia to offer industrial training as a part of its curriculum.
- From 1891-1950, the school located on Hall Street served 1st-11th grades with the first 12th grade graduating class being in 1952.
- In 1959, the school moved to a new building on Hines Street that served 5th-12th grades while kindergarten-4th grades remained at the original site that became T. J. Elder Primary School.
- On May 12, 1981, it became the first Rosenwald school in Georgia to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- In 1979, the Washington County Elderite Association, Inc., a non profit organization, was formed by alumni of T. J. Elder High School.
- Through community development block grants and other funds, the T. J. Elder Community Center was established and is managed by the Washington County Elderite Association, Inc.
- School memorabilia is on display inside the Community Center.

Brochure created by:

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