

A WINDOW INTO AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY LIFE

James Awbrey Johnson and the American Union Relief Society

Rosenwald Lodge • Division No. 3 • Lodge No. 68 • 1943

Shirley Johnson Walker

August 5, 2026

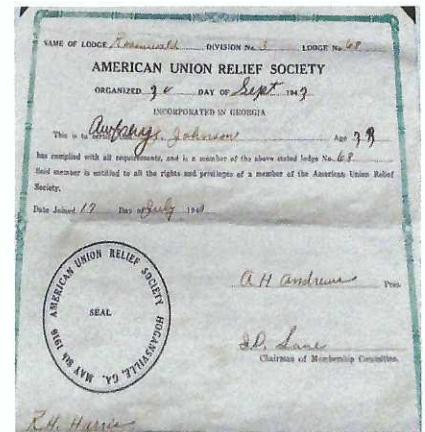
Original American Union Relief Society certificate, front and back.
Preserved among the personal papers of member James Awbrey Johnson.

WHAT THE CERTIFICATE DOCUMENTS

This membership certificate records Awbrey Johnson, age 33, as a member of the American Union Relief Society's Rosenwald Lodge, Division No. 3, Lodge No. 68. His membership is dated July 17, 1943. The Society's seal identifies Hogansville, Georgia, and bears the date May 8, 1916. Because the certificate was retained among James Awbrey Johnson's personal belongings, and the name and age correspond to him, the document is strong primary evidence of his membership.

WHAT THE CERTIFICATE REPRESENTS

The American Union Relief Society was a benevolent or mutual-aid organization. Organizations of this kind were especially important in African American communities during segregation, when Black families often faced restricted access to commercial insurance and other institutions. Such societies commonly promoted fellowship and collective responsibility and could provide assistance connected with sickness, death, burial, and family need. The exact benefits and rules of this Society remain a subject for further documentary research.

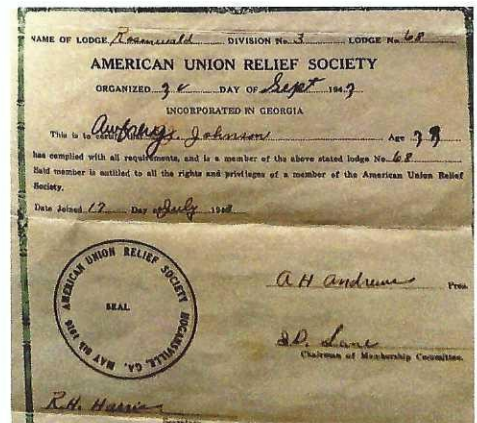


James Awbrey Johnson

THE ROSENWALD AND RCTS CONNECTION

The lodge name "Rosenwald" is historically significant. Julius Rosenwald, working with Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee Institute, helped support the construction of schools for African American children in communities across the racially segregated South. Randolph County, Alabama was part of the larger Rosenwald-School landscape, and the history of those communities in east Alabama and west Georgia forms part of the historical setting in which the Randolph County Training School (RCTS) emerged in 1919. The certificate does not by

itself prove that Rosenwald Lodge No. 68 was formally affiliated with the Randolph County Training School. The Lodge may have been given the Rosenwald name to honor Julius Roswenwald, or for another reason. That relationship should remain identified as a research question until additional documentary evidence is found.



WHY THE RELIEF SOCIETY MATTERS TO RCTS HISTORY

The certificate offers a rare personal glimpse into the network of institutions that sustained African American life in the first half of the twentieth century: family, church, school, mutual aid, and community organizations. For RCTS alumni and descendants, it helps preserve the broader story of self-help, education, collective advancement, and community responsibility that surrounded generations of Black families in Randolph County, Alabama and neighboring communities. Artifact identification: American Union Relief Society membership certificate of James Awbrey ("Awbrey") Johnson; Rosenwald Lodge, Division No. 3, Lodge No. 68; membership dated July 17, 1943. Society seal: Hogansville, Georgia, May 8, 1916. James Awbrey and Georgiana Johnson's children attended the Randolph County Training School (Claxton, Rudolph, Juline, Tommy, Frances, Vinson, Edward, Sidney, and Shirley).