

George Washington Carver

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Monument
Missouri



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George Washington Carver had a timeless message for humanity. Yet he became famous not for his great wisdom, nor for his brilliance as an educator, but for transforming peanuts into products such as ink, paper, soap, glue, dyes, massage oil, milk, cosmetics, and more. It is not so much his specific achievements as the humane philosophy behind them that define the man. “It is not the style of clothes one wears, neither the kind of automobile one drives, nor the amount of money one has in the bank, that counts. These mean nothing. It is simply service that measures success.”

Carver was motivated by his love for all of creation. For him, every life—a tiny fungus in healthy soil, the ever-present flower on his lapel, a forest bird, a human being of any complexion or nationality—was a window on God and a mouthpiece through which the Great Creator spoke. He saw all living things as interrelated. His vision brought forth his teachings: A successful life is one of service through helping others; real education helps us understand life, bringing us the kind of happiness that inspires us to help humanity; true religion is expressed in love and kindness toward all life; science worthy of its name is truth, which sets us free.

Every facet of Carver’s life and his teaching, including his peanut work, can be traced inward to reveal a genius whose source is the deep creative fountain of the inner spirit. Let George Washington Carver National Monument introduce you to this humble man whose love of God and agriculture became a ministry to benefit humanity.

Texts by Peter Duncan Burchard

Carver about age 38, Tuskegee; 1925 *Agricultural Bulletin 31*; Carver’s microscope, palette, paint brush (*far left*).

Carver about age 77; he called his laboratory “God’s little workshop” (*left and middle*).

Carver loved art. A painting he exhibited at the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair received honorable mention (*near left*).

Teaching at Tuskegee Institute (*below*).

Lifelong Service to Humanity

George Washington Carver mastered chemistry, botany, mycology (study of fungi), music, herbalism, art, cooking, and massage. But his life began in slavery about 1864 in Diamond Grove, Mo. Young George longed for an education to help him understand nature’s mysteries, but schooling was denied him. At about age 11 he left home to seek answers on his own. His quest led him through poverty, prejudice, violence, and injustice.

Eventually finding himself rejected from college due to his race, he tried his hand at homesteading in Kansas. Finally, in 1890 he was accepted as an art major at Simpson College in Iowa, where he was the only African American. Within a year, his desire of preparing to serve his people forced a painful decision to leave art. Carver transferred to Iowa State Agricultural College (today’s Iowa State University) to pursue agriculture. “The more my ideas develop, the more beautiful and grand seems the plan I have laid out to pursue, or rather the one God has destined for me. It is really all I see in a successful life.”

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.

George Washington Carver

TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE



Peanut plants have an unusual growth cycle. Flowers appear above ground among the leaves. As the blooms mature, pegs (stems) form and grow down into the soil, where peanut pods develop. Carver discovered more than 300 uses for peanuts. In the 1930s he treated polio patients with massage therapy and peanut rubbing oil.

PEANUT PLANT / SEWARD FARMS, VA.; ARTIFACTS / NPS MUSEUM MGT., TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE. PHOTOS / NPS

vation techniques, and recipes for nutritious meals. Several of the 43 bulletins were distributed throughout the world.

Carver came to public attention in 1921 with his captivating testimony before a U.S. Congress House committee debating a peanut tariff bill. Two years later he converted young Southern whites at a YMCA retreat into near disciples. They arranged speaking tours for him to colleges where no African American had ever been welcome. Carver became a symbol of interracial cooperation. His work and encyclopedic knowledge of plant properties impressed Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, who sought information from him on industrial uses of plants, including peanuts and soybeans.

Carver died at Tuskegee on January 5, 1943. That July, Congress designated George Washington Carver National Monument, the first park to honor an African American scientist, educator, and humanitarian.

He earned a Bachelor of Agriculture degree in 1894 and a Masters of Agriculture degree in 1896. That year Carver accepted an offer from Booker T. Washington to head the new Agriculture Department at Tuskegee Institute, Ala. The post answered Carver’s dream “to be the greatest good to the greatest number of my people.” At that renowned school for African Americans, Carver became a beacon to students who were inspired by his ability to overcome so many obstacles.

His peanut work, beginning about 1903, was aimed at freeing African American farmers and the South from the tyranny of king cotton. With innovative farming methods, he convinced Southern farmers to grow such soil-enriching crops as soybeans and peanuts, in addition to cotton. At the heart of his vision for an economically rejuvenated South was his teaching that nature produced no waste. Embracing a message of hope “to help the man farthest down,” Carver produced a series of free Agricultural Bulletins (*see Bulletin 31, far left*) that provided information on crops, culti-