

From Diamond, Missouri

George Washington Carver—More than just peanuts!

George Washington Carver (January 1864 – January 5, 1943) was an American scientist, botanist, educator, and inventor. Carver was born into slavery in Diamond Grove, Newton County, near Crystal Place, now known as Diamond, Missouri, possibly in 1864 or 1865, though the exact date is not known. His master, Moses Carver, was a German American immigrant who had purchased George's parents, Mary and Giles, from William P. McGinnis on October 9, 1855, for \$700. Carver had 10 sisters and a brother, all of whom died prematurely.

When George was only a week old, George, a sister, and his mother were kidnapped by night raiders from Arkansas. George's brother, James, was rushed to safety from the kidnapers. The kidnapers sold the slaves in Kentucky. Moses Carver hired John Bentley to find them, but he located only the infant George. Moses negotiated with the raiders to gain the boy's return and rewarded Bentley.

After slavery was abolished, Moses Carver and his wife Susan raised George and his older brother James as their own children. They encouraged George to continue his intellectual pursuits, and "Aunt Susan" taught him the basics of reading and writing.

Black people were not allowed at the public school in Diamond Grove. After learning there was a school for black children, ten miles south in Neosho, George decided to go there. When he reached the town, he found the school closed for the night. He slept in a nearby barn. By his own account, the next morning he met a kind woman, Mariah Watkins, from whom he wished to rent a room. When he identified himself as "Carver's George," as he had done his whole life, she replied that from now on his name was "George Carver." George liked this lady very much, and her words, "You must learn all you can, then go back out into the world and give your learning back to the people," made a great impression on him.



George Washington Carver (1864-1943)

"Reading about nature is fine, but if a person walks in the woods and listens carefully, he can learn more than what is in books, for they speak with the voice of God."

From 1915 to 1923, Carver concentrated on researching and experimenting with new uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes, soybeans, pecans, and other crops, as well as having his assistants research and compile existing uses. This work, and especially his speaking to a national conference of the Peanut Growers Association in 1920 and in testimony before Congress in 1921 to support passage of a tariff on imported peanuts, brought him wide publicity and increasing renown. In these years, he became one of the most well-known African Americans of his time.

Legacy

George Washington Carver's iconic status remained after his death; in part due to steps that Carver and others took during his lifetime to establish his legacy. Carver, who had lived a frugal life, used his savings to establish a museum devoted to his work, including some of his own paintings and

drawings. In December, 1947, a fire broke out in the museum, destroying much of the collection. One of the surviving works by Carver is a painting of a yucca and a cactus, displayed at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. In addition to the museum, Carver also established the George Washington Carver Foundation at Tuskegee, with the aim of supporting future agricultural research.

A project to erect a national monument in Carver's honor also began before his death. Harry S. Truman, then a senator from Missouri, sponsored a bill in favor of a monument during World War II. Supporters of the bill argued that the wartime expenditure was warranted because the monument would promote patriotic fervor among African-Americans and encourage them to enlist in the military. The bill passed unanimously in both houses.

Carver appeared on U.S. commemorative postal stamps in 1948 and 1998, as well as a commemorative half dollar coin minted between 1951 and 1954. Numerous schools bear his name, as do two United States military vessels. In 2005, the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis opened a George Washington Carver garden, which includes a life-size statue of the garden's famous namesake. These honors attest to George Washington Carver's enduring legacy as an icon of African-American achievement, and of Ameri-



Launching the liberty ship S.S. George Washington Carver, May 7, 1943.

can ingenuity more broadly. Carver's life has come to symbolize the transformative potential of education, even for those born into the most unfortunate and difficult of circumstances.

Despite his education, Dr. Carver insisted that his work was inspired by his Creator. He willingly shared his strong faith in his letters and speeches. In 1920, he told an audience of young Christian men, "The Great Creator taught me to take the peanut apart and put it together again. And out of the process have come forth all these products!"

Article and photos: Wikipedia

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