

MARIAH WATKINS



Mrs. Mariah Watkins

“You must learn all you can, then go back out into the world and give your learning back to the people.”

— Mariah Watkins

Mariah Watkins was born into slavery sometime around 1824 in North Carolina. It was against the law in many states to teach enslaved people to read, but an enslaved girl named Libby is believed to have taught her to read and write.

It is said that Mariah later had children of her own, but, because of slavery, they were taken away from her and sold. After the war, she married Andrew Watkins in St. Louis. They moved to Neosho Missouri and lived in a small house near a school for African Americans.

About five years later, George Washington Carver walked the eight miles to Neosho to start school. He arrived after dark and went to sleep in a barn. Luckily for him, the barn was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Watkins. They allowed him to live with them in exchange for chores.

Mariah took in laundry for work and would not **tolerate** the wasting of time. George went to the Watkins house during school recess to do laundry and to study at the same time.

Mariah Watkins was trained as mid-wife and known for medical skills. She also had knowledge of medicinal plants.

Mariah Watkins was a deeply religious woman and strengthened George’s faith by taking him to church and teaching him to read the Bible she gave him. He carried that Bible for the rest of his life.



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Neosho Second Baptist Church, approximately 1880

When George left to attend another school, Mariah urged him to share what he learned with other African Americans. George Washington Carver always remembered her advice.

Many years later Mariah Watkins wrote a letter to George dated January 5, 1906. The letter reads, *"...I am in the land of the living and still remain your friend. I have never forgotten you since you left us they never have been a day but what I have remembered you in my prayers and my memory of you is as fresh as if I only saw you yesterday... I can always see you looking in the glass as you did the last day you were here...I also have all of your books yet..."*.

GLOSSARY

Tolerate - Stand for, put up with.

TIME LINE • GAINING AN EDUCATION: 1876 – 1896

