

HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS: THE EARLY LIFE OF GEORGE W. CARVER

HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY
GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER NATIONAL MONUMENT
DIAMOND, MISSOURI

BY
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*George Carver as a young boy in Missouri, circa 1876.
Courtesy of George Washington Carver National Monument*

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Recommended:

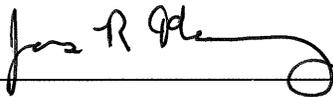


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Date

Again we see this type of greatness in a George Washington Carver, whose scientific genius could have bought him millions, but whose love for his work and dedication to humanity caused him to stay in his laboratory in Tuskegee, Alabama and serve on a meager salary until his death. On the basis of Jesus' standards such men are truly great.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Executive Summary

The George Washington Carver National Monument, located near Diamond, Missouri, was authorized by Congress on July 14, 1943, and formally dedicated on July 14, 1953, to memorialize and preserve the 240-acre birthplace home of George Washington Carver (circa 1865–January 5, 1943), famous scientist, agriculturalist, educator, and humanitarian. The purpose of this historic resource study is to assist the National Park Service in interpreting the early life experiences of George Washington Carver, from his birth in circa 1865, through his childhood on the Moses Carver farm, to his travels in search of formal education in Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa. While many biographies of this remarkable individual concentrate on his work at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Macon County, Alabama, this study emphasizes Carver’s childhood years on the Moses Carver farm and his quest for schooling.

The historic resource study fills important gaps in the scholarship by placing George Washington Carver’s life experiences within broader regional and national contexts. One key research finding concerns Carver’s spirituality, which can be traced to a personal conversion on the Moses Carver farm. Carver’s religious awakening served as a defining moment in his life and later informed his view on the natural world and his environmental thinking.

The research methodology includes a multi-archival approach and utilizes Carver’s own written words and recollections to describe his early life events when possible. The final report is intended for park managers and cultural resources specialists and, as such, concludes with an examination of extant historic, natural, and cultural resources at the national monument. Also appended is a cultural resources base map that annotates the monument’s significant resources over time.

Introduction

Historians have been tough on George Washington Carver (circa 1865–January 5, 1943), the scientist, agriculturalist, educator, and humanitarian. In 1972, Louis R. Harlan, in *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901*, which later won the Bancroft Prize, argued that Carver had “lived a life of undeniable usefulness while out-Bookering Booker Washington.”¹ It was not meant as a compliment. Carver, who was easily one of the most recognized African Americans in the United States at the height of his popularity in the late 1930s, had, over the course of one generation, been consigned into the proverbial dustbin of academic history. As another prominent historian observed, he had been “relegated to children’s textbooks and inspirational literature.”² In recent years, however, scholarly interest in George Washington Carver has undergone a rebirth, coinciding with the burgeoning field of African American environmental thought, which seeks to develop a more inclusive understanding of environmental history. This new scholarship, which explores how African Americans have interacted with the natural environment, and other additions to the historiography—including a study on the dynamics of slavery and slaveholding practices in Missouri—have brought renewed interest in the life and times of the scientist.

This desire to reassess the influence of George Washington Carver has also extended to the National Park Service and, specifically, to the George Washington Carver National Monument. The national monument is located in rural southwest Missouri in Section 7 of Township 26-N, Range 31-W, Fifth Meridian, near the community of Diamond in Newton County. The region, situated along the western edge of the Ozarks, is part of the Springfield Plain, a vibrant and ecologically diverse subsection of the Ozark Highlands ecoregion. The George Washington Carver National Monument, which was authorized by Congress on July 14, 1943, and formally dedicated on July 14, 1953, is charged with “maintain[ing], preserv[ing], and interpret[ing], in a suitable and enduring manner, the life and legacy of George Washington Carver for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States of America.”³ The national monument preserves George Washington Carver’s birthplace and childhood home and encompasses the original 240-acre Moses Carver farm where George Washington Carver was born circa 1865. Additionally, the site has the unique distinction of being the first national monument honoring both the accomplishments of an African American and someone other than a president.

The purpose of this historic resource study is to provide baseline documentation for the National Park Service on the early life of George Washington Carver, from his birth in circa 1865, through his formative childhood on the Moses Carver farm, to his twenty-year odyssey in search of formal education in Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa, and, finally, to his transition to a life of teaching at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Macon County, Alabama. The historic resource study is designed to serve as a tool for current and

¹ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 276-77.

² Paul S. Sutter, “Foreword,” in Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), ix.

³ “George Washington Carver National Monument Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” George Washington Carver National Monument, National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, November 2007, pg. 10, GWCNM Library.

future site managers and cultural resources specialists in interpreting the history and significance of the Moses Carver farm. To this end, the study includes, at the conclusion of the report, an examination of extant contributing (and noncontributing) historic, natural, and cultural resources that could be utilized in the interpretation and contextualization of the life, history, and times of George Washington Carver. In many ways, this has been a straightforward undertaking, as Carver had an avid interest in the natural environment and left several biographical sketches that detailed his time on the Moses Carver farm. A cultural resources base map, which highlights the monument's historic resources circa 1865, including the Carver cemetery, has also been included. The cemetery, which was set aside by Moses and Susan Carver in the 1830s for use as a small family burial plot, currently comprises one-tenth of an acre in the southeast quarter of Section 7 of Township 26-N, Range 31-W. Finally, the study benefits from a representative sampling of historic photographs providing another window on Carver's life.

The historic resource study also fills several gaps in the scholarship by placing George Washington Carver's life experiences within broader regional and national contexts. The following research questions were of particular interest and helped frame the research agenda: How did Missouri's agrarian economy, which was dominated by small farms rather than large plantations, affect the state's slave culture? What were the dynamics of race relations in southwest Missouri during the postbellum decades as previously enslaved African Americans moved to free citizenry? What educational opportunities were available for African Americans in southwest Missouri during Reconstruction, and how did they change over time? How did the migration of newly freed African Americans affect the development of post-slave communities? How did George Washington Carver benefit from the mutual aid networks that developed in the wake of the Civil War? How did George Washington Carver's religious conversion coincide with the broader spiritual awakening that occurred among recently freed African Americans in the trans-Mississippi West? Taken together, these questions helped provoke a fresh interpretation of the life and times of George Washington Carver.

While many previous studies on George Washington Carver emphasized his time at the Tuskegee Institute, this study stresses how Carver's formative years on the Moses Carver farm influenced his later achievements. It was in southwest Missouri that Carver first developed a lifelong fascination with plants, known as his floral beauties, and a deep intellectual curiosity. Despite being denied schooling because of his race, Carver persevered in his search for an education. In an era when few white Americans and even fewer African Americans had access to higher education, Carver attended Simpson College and Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm (now Iowa State University), receiving a bachelor of agriculture degree and a master of science in agriculture degree. Carver's success at completing this academic training should not be discounted—it marked the culmination of a twenty-year odyssey in which he overcame significant hardships and racial barriers.

At the same time, there is an inherent difficulty in researching George Washington Carver. Although he was a prolific letter writer, he could also be subtle and elusive when talking about himself and his life experiences. As biographer Linda O. McMurry astutely observed, "In examining Carver, every question seemed to have both a 'yes' and 'no' answer."⁴ When

⁴ Linda O. McMurry, "George Washington Carver and the Challenges of Biography," *Vitae Scholasticae* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 9.

possible, and within the confines of the larger research scope, this study has also attempted to resolve the myth and counter-myth legacy of Carver, that is, to attempt to unravel his contributions as an educator and scientist. Although it has been common convention to see Carver as a great teacher, there has been confusion about what this means. This study examines his role in the classroom at the Tuskegee Institute and as an early promoter of scientific agriculture in Alabama. For more than three decades, Carver advocated scientific methods to Southern farmers—particularly black sharecroppers and tenants—who had become overly dependent on cotton. He stressed self-sufficiency through crop rotation, waste salvaging, crop diversification, and a renewed respect for the natural world.

The historiography on George Washington Carver is diverse and includes popular and scholarly histories as well as Christian treatments. The historic resource study builds on the works of several biographers, but three monographs proved particularly beneficial: Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist & Symbol* (1981); Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (1987); and Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (2011). Together, they formed the core of the current Carver canon. Other histories that were employed included Raleigh H. Merritt, *From Captivity to Fame, or the Life of George Washington Carver* (1929); Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver: An American Biography* (1943); Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (1976); Lawrence Elliott, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (1966); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (2003); Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Borders: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815–1865* (2010); and Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (2011).

The study also attempts to make a contribution to the field of African American environmental thought. The following two books formed the study's interpretation of that field: Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History* (2006), and Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought* (2007).

This historic resource study uses some of Carver's own written words and recollections to describe his life events. The microfilm collection of the George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, maintained in the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress, proved extremely useful in this regard. The study also required extensive primary research in the following archival collections: Museum and Archives of the George Washington Carver National Monument; George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University Library; G. W. Carver Papers, The Henry Ford; Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, East Carolina University; George Washington Carver Correspondence, Simpson College; Austin W. Curtis Papers, University of Michigan; and Thomas Hart Benton Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Relevant materials were also obtained from the Madison County Historical Society, Missouri State Archives, Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, and Newton County Historical Society.

The six chapters of the historic resource study follow a chronological approach. Chapter one examines the early history of the Carver family and the migration of three brothers, George

Carver, Richard Carver, and Moses Carver, to Diamond Grove, Missouri, in the mid- or late 1830s. The chapter describes the selection of a 240-acre homestead site and the acquisition of the property under the right of preemption, as well as agricultural production and homestead improvements. Chapter two begins with an analysis of the institution of slavery in antebellum Missouri and documents the purchase of an enslaved African American girl by Moses and Susan Carver in October 1855. The chapter chronicles the early life of Mary and her children, including the future George Washington Carver, and opines on what slave quarters on the farm may have been like. Chapter three examines the early life of Carver and his relationships with his brother James, Moses and Susan Carver, and the other laborers who worked and lived on the property. The chapter also describes Carver's spiritual awakening. Chapter four explores Carver's search for schooling and his travels through nine midwestern towns including Neosho and Kansas City, Missouri; Fort Scott, Olathe, Paola, Minneapolis, Highland, and Beeler, Kansas; and Winterset, Iowa. Carver began his odyssey in Neosho, Missouri, living with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, the first of several African Americans—including Ben and Lucy Seymour, Willis and Delilah Moore, and Clara C. Duncan—who provided shelter and guidance to the boy. Chapter five explores Carver's time at Simpson College and Iowa Agricultural College, and his hiring, in 1896, by Booker T. Washington. The chapter describes Carver's successes as an instructor at the Tuskegee Institute and some of the challenges he faced as an administrator. Chapter six examines Carver in the public sphere, first as a leading proponent of scientific agriculture and then in connection with the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. The study concludes with a brief discussion regarding the establishment of the George Washington Carver National Monument.

Projects of this type and size are typically a collaborative effort, and I would like to acknowledge the many individuals, both current and former History Associates staff, who assisted during the research and writing. These include Kimberly Silvi, Joe Matty, James Lide, Andrew Simpson, Gail Mathews, Robin Filan, Duncan Campbell, Dave Wiseman, Brian Martin, and Philip Cantelon. I also wish to acknowledge the kind assistance provided by the staff of the National Park Service, including, among others, Jim Heaney, Lana Henry, Curtis Gregory, Neal Hause, and Rachel Franklin-Weekley.

Chapter One

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MOSES CARVER FARM

The establishment of the Moses Carver farm in Newton County, Missouri, was a family endeavor. The homestead was established in the mid- or late 1830s when three brothers, George Carver, Richard Carver, and Moses Carver, decided to leave Sangamon County, Illinois, and migrate west in search of unsettled land. The Carvers selected a 240-acre homestead site near Diamond Grove that consisted of both prairie and woodlands and had ample water. Assisted by his brothers and their extended families, Moses constructed a simple log cabin on the farm and worked to improve the land. After acquiring title under the right of preemption, he and his wife, Susan, assisted by two nephews and a niece, experienced success cultivating Indian corn, oats, wheat, Irish potatoes, and other crops, and also raising livestock. By the mid-1850s, Moses Carver administered a diversified farm that was both self-sufficient and increasingly prosperous.

The Early History of the Carver Family

The migration of the Carver family to Missouri in the 1830s and the subsequent establishment and development of the Moses Carver farm property were a continuation of a process of assimilation that had begun in the early eighteenth century. Unfortunately, like many facets of George W. Carver's life, the Carver genealogical record is conflicting and contradictory. Some writers have indicated that the Carvers emigrated from Germany, while others have argued that they were of English descent. Moses Carver himself provided contradictory statements on the issue: on the 1880 federal census, Carver claimed that his parents were born in North Carolina, while on the 1910 federal census he reported that his parents were born in Germany.¹ A privately published history of the Carver family titled *A History of the Danner Family: Jacob Danner and His Four Sons George, Samuel, Frederick and Jacob, Jr.*, which was prepared between 1929 and 1931 by Rose Carver Danner and her husband Jefferson D. Danner, stated that the Carvers originally came "from a section of the country called the Palatinate lying between Germany and France. The Upper Palatinate embraces the Kingdom of Bavaria, and the Lower Palatinate lay on both sides of the Rhine, being bounded by Maintz, Treves, Lorraine, Alsace, Baden, and Wurtemberg."² The initial biographers of George W. Carver, including Raleigh H. Merritt and Rackham Holt, who published in the 1930s and 1940s, repeated this claim of Germanic ancestry.³ However, Mae Carver Newlin, a Carver descendant who corresponded with a National Park Service historian in the 1950s, flatly rejected this parentage, noting that "the Carvers were of English-Quaker stock and not German as stated by

¹ "1880 Federal Census," entry for Moses Carver in Marion, Newton, Missouri, accessed through Ancestry.com, and "1910 Federal Census," entry for Moses Carver in Garden, Cherokee, Kansas, accessed through Ancestry.com.

² Rose Carver Danner, *A History of the Danner Family: Jacob Danner and His Four Sons George, Samuel, Frederick and Jacob, Jr.* (Willows, CA: privately printed, 1931), i, 1.

³ See, for example, Raleigh H. Merritt, *From Captivity to Fame: Or the Life of George Washington Carver* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1938), 24.

Rackham Holt in her biography.”⁴ For his part, George W. Carver believed his former master was German.⁵ Writing circa 1922, Carver famously declared “I was born in Diamond Grove, Mo., about the close of the great Civil War, in a little one-roomed log shanty, on the home of Mr. Moses Carver, a German by birth and the owner of my mother, my father being the property of Mr. Grant, who owned the adjoining plantation.”⁶

Michael Carver, the paternal grandfather of Moses Carver, is believed to be the first Carver in the English colonies.⁷ It is likely that he immigrated to Philadelphia, part of the Province of Pennsylvania, circa 1727, a time that saw rapid population growth in the British colony. Indeed, the large number of non-British immigrants who arrived in Pennsylvania during this period alarmed local officials. In 1727, the Pennsylvania Provincial Council, or General Assembly, passed a law requiring that all foreign immigrants over the age of sixteen had to swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown.⁸ Although a record of Michael Carver’s arrival in Philadelphia has not been located, in 1999 a team of researchers from the University of Wisconsin–Madison found an entry for a possible relation, Nicholas Carver, on a 1729 passenger list of immigrants bound for Philadelphia.⁹ Nicholas Carver was described as being from Germany’s Palatinate district.¹⁰ It was unclear if Nicholas Carver was related to Moses Carver.

Michael Carver is believed to have settled in Bucks County, which, with Philadelphia and Chester, formed the original three counties in Pennsylvania. The area where he settled was later subdivided as Northampton County.¹¹ By 1749, Michael Carver owned property and was presumably married.¹² Over the next decade he and his wife, whose name is not known, had three children, named George, Christian, and Anna M.¹³ The birth dates for George and Anna are unclear, but Christian was born in 1759.¹⁴ George Carver may have been named in honor of King George II (1683–1760), as was customary among some colonists in the years before the American Revolution. It is interesting to note that Carver descendants utilized George as a given name (that is, Christian name) for at least two generations, and possibly three, if one includes George W. Carver.¹⁵

⁴ Robert P. Fuller, “Report on Project #4: Moses Carver and His Family,” October 18, 1955, 1, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, George Washington Carver National Monument Park (hereafter GWCNM).

⁵ George Washington Carver, “A Brief Sketch of My Life,” ca. 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0011, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Rose Carver Danner, *A History of Christian Carver and Frederick Danner and Their Descendants* (Willows, CA: privately printed, 1931), 5.

⁸ John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen, “Springs of Genius: An Integrated Management Plan for George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” February 1999, Appendix II, i, prepared for the National Park Service, Midwest Region, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁹ Ibid., i-ii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., and “The Carvers of Diamond,” *Newton County Roots* 5, no. 3 (September 1993): 13-18.

¹⁴ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 5.

¹⁵ “The Carvers of Diamond,” 13-18.

In the early 1770s, Michael Carver moved his family to Surry County in North Carolina.¹⁶ Whether this migration was a response to the unrest that was engulfing the northern colonies, particularly Massachusetts and New York, as a result of the impending Revolutionary War, is not known. In any case, Michael Carver filed a patent on six hundred acres of land near Stewarts Creek in Surry County on July 25, 1778. In 1783, he received a patent for the land.¹⁷ Unfortunately, little else is known about the life or work of Michael Carver other than that he died sometime in either 1787 or 1788.¹⁸ In February 1788, his estate was sold by his executors, who included Adam Black, his daughter Anna M. Carver, and her husband, George Ziegler.¹⁹

The life of Christian Carver, the middle child of Michael Carver and the father of Moses Carver, is better documented. At the age of eighteen, Christian Carver enlisted in the Continental army. He served as a private in the Surry County Regiment in North Carolina for approximately nine months and was under the command of Captain Henry Smith and later Captain John Crouse.²⁰ In August 1777, Carver's company marched to the small town of Salisbury in Rowan County, North Carolina, where he assisted in protecting a storage magazine.²¹ Between November 1777 and January 1778, Carver's company served in Hillsborough, in Orange County, North Carolina. According to an affidavit made by Christian Carver in October 1832 in support of his claim for a pension, his duties included protecting the Legislature, "[which] was in session . . . against the Tories."²² Years later, in December 1897, a newspaper in Kansas City, Missouri, reported that Moses Carver still possessed the "sword which his father carried in our war for independence."²³

In 1785, Christian Carver married Magdalina Ziegler. They had five children: George, Jacob, Michael, Elizabeth, and Elvira.²⁴ When Magdalina died unexpectedly, Christian married her younger sister, Mary (Polly) Ziegler, in September 1801. Christian and Mary (Polly) also had five children: Abraham, Richard, Solomon, Mary (Polly), and Moses.²⁵ The household, which included siblings from both marriages, moved from North Carolina to Montgomery County, Ohio, in 1802. Seven years later the family relocated again, this time to Switzerland County, Indiana.²⁶ In 1823, either in search of work or perhaps for better land, the Carver household, which now also included the wife and children of Jacob Carver, moved to Sangamon County, Illinois, where Christian Carver established a small farm approximately four miles east of Springfield.²⁷ Approximately seven years later, Christian Carver reported on the 1830 federal census that his household had four members—one free white male aged seventy to eighty, one free white male aged fifteen to twenty, one free white female aged fifty to sixty, and one free

¹⁶ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 5-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4, 5-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

²² *Ibid.*, 33-34, and "Application for Membership of Albert Carver," Illinois Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, January 22, 1912, SAR Membership Number 23694, accessed through Ancestry.com.

²³ "Missouri Notes," *Kansas City Star (MO)*, December 14, 1897, 6.

²⁴ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 6-8, and "The Carvers of Diamond," 13-18.

²⁵ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 16-17, 30-31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16, 33-34; see also "Application for Membership of Albert Carver."

white female aged ten to fifteen.²⁸ Christian Carver remained in Sangamon County until he died, at the age of seventy-seven, on March 14, 1836.²⁹

Christian Carver's children appeared to have remained quite close during their formative years, and they may have pooled their resources in commercial or farming ventures. A particularly strong relationship developed between George Carver, the first son of Christian's first marriage; Richard Carver, the second son of Christian's second marriage; and Moses Carver, the youngest son of the second marriage.³⁰ George Carver was born in North Carolina circa 1786 and eventually married Sally Hoover.³¹ Richard Carver was born in Ohio on April 4, 1804.³² In December 1826, at the age of twenty-two, he was commissioned as a lieutenant in the 20th Regiment of Illinois Militia.³³ Five years later, he was appointed a captain in the regiment. Richard Carver may have also tried his hand at farming in Putnam County, Illinois.³⁴ On November 9, 1833, he was listed as the patentee on 320 acres of land "on which taxes remain[ed] due and unpaid for the year 1833."³⁵ Moses Carver was born on August 29, 1812, in Dayton, Ohio, and married Susan Blue in Springfield, Illinois, on August 11, 1834.³⁶ Described by family members as "a frugal and industrial type," Moses Carver may also have been an incidental acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln while they both lived in Sangamon County.³⁷ George W. Carver certainly believed the family lore, writing circa 1939 that "old Mr. Carver, who owned my mother, knew the Lincoln family very well indeed. Used to live alongside of them when young Abraham was just a little boy and many are the interesting stories that he told with reference to the family."³⁸ Moses Carver's obituary, which appeared in the *Daily Illinois State Journal*, Springfield, Illinois, on December 22, 1910, also reported an association between the two men.³⁹

²⁸ "Christian Carver," Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Sangamon, Illinois, 162, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-DC), accessed through Ancestry.com.

²⁹ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁵ "List of lands lying in the County of Putnam, on which taxes remain due and unpaid for the year 1833," *Illinois Weekly State Journal (Springfield, IL)*, November 9, 1833, 3.

³⁶ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 30, and "Moses Carver Is Dead," *Daily Illinois State Journal (Springfield, IL)*, December 22, 1910, 5.

³⁷ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 30.

³⁸ G. W. Carver to Roy T. Basseler, ca. 1939, Reel 27, Frame 0169, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁹ "Moses Carver Is Dead," 5.



Figure 1. Moses Carver, right, and William Moore Williams, husband of Sarah Jane, circa 1860s.
George Washington Carver National Monument.

The Migration of the Carvers to Missouri

At some point in the mid- or late 1830s, George Carver, Richard Carver, and Moses Carver made the decision to leave Sangamon County, Illinois, and migrate southwest to Missouri. The state, which had been admitted into the Union on August 10, 1821, was lightly settled and only one or two decades removed from being a frontier meeting place for French, Anglo, and American Indian trappers and traders. In 1804, the area, which was then known as Upper Louisiana or the Territory of Louisiana, had a settler population of approximately ten thousand. Most of these early settlers had migrated either from Kentucky or Tennessee.⁴⁰ By 1812, the population had doubled to twenty thousand, and Upper Louisiana became the Territory of Missouri or the Missouri Territory.⁴¹ By the early 1820s, Missouri's population had reached more than sixty-six thousand. Between 1815 and 1861, most settlers to Missouri had

⁴⁰ Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II, 1820 to 1860* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971, 2000), 35, and William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 1-2, 184-87.

⁴¹ R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 31, and Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri*, 1-2, 184, 223.

migrated from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, or North Carolina.⁴² Close proximity and a large expanse of unsettled land no doubt played a part in pulling the Carvers to Missouri. Indeed, several historians have observed that the 1830s served as a tipping point for Missouri in which the state “emerged as a magnet for . . . families of limited means.”⁴³



Figure 2. Map of the Missouri Territory, formerly Louisiana, by Mathew Carey, 1814. *Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.*

The exact date that the Carvers began their migration to Missouri is not known—and there was some evidence that the process may have played out over a period of one or two years as family members liquidated their holdings in Sangamon County.⁴⁴ The earliest reference to the move appeared in a newspaper article in the *Kansas City Star*, Kansas City, Missouri, dated December 14, 1897. It reported that Moses Carver had arrived in Missouri in 1837, saying, “Uncle Moses Carver, as he is familiarly called, is 85 years old and has lived in Newton county since 1837.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately, this document was contradicted by Moses Carver’s obituary,

⁴² Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 6; Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery’s Border: Missouri’s Small-Slaveholding Households 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 24-29; McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II*, 37-38; Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri*, 238-45.

⁴³ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 27; see also Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 52.

⁴⁴ John Harrington et al., “Spirits of Genius,” Appendix II, iii.

⁴⁵ “Missouri Notes,” 6.

which appeared in the *Daily Illinois State Journal*, Springfield, Illinois, on December 22, 1910. It stated that “Mr. Carver removed to Springfield at an early age and resided here until 1839 when he removed with his family to Diamond, MO.”⁴⁶ Other sources, including Danner’s family history and Linda O. McMurry’s seminal biography of George W. Carver, argued that Richard Carver, Moses Carver, and their families migrated to Missouri around 1838.⁴⁷ It is also possible that one or two of the Carver brothers, accompanied by Charity Dunn, George Carver’s mother-in-law, made expeditions into Missouri as early as 1835 to locate suitable land before the main contingent of family members and children relocated en masse. Like other settlers during the period, the Carvers probably traveled either in covered wagons or by wagon train and possibly along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers.⁴⁸ Finally, it appeared that Moses Carver may have retained property in Illinois even after his migration to Missouri. On November 1, 1839, he received land patents from the U.S. General Land Office, a predecessor of the Bureau of Land Management, for the transfer of eighty acres in Section 21 of Township 16-N, Range 4-W, in Sangamon County.⁴⁹

At least two of the Carver brothers, Richard and Moses, settled in Newton County in southwest Missouri. The county, which was founded in 1838, bordered Kansas on the west and was one county north of Arkansas.⁵⁰ The region, situated along the western edge of the Ozarks, is part of the Springfield Plain, a vibrant and ecologically diverse subsection of the Ozark Highlands ecoregion.⁵¹ The Springfield Plain is characterized by large swaths of prairies in the west, prairies and oak woodlands in the east, and “glades, sinkholes, and depressional wetlands scattered throughout.”⁵² Historically, Springfield Plain forests contained ash, sugar maple, and walnut trees.⁵³ Woodlands animals included wild turkeys, black bears, raccoons, and grey squirrels, with beavers, otters, muskrats, and mink inhabiting the banks of rivers and streams. A wider variety of wildlife could be found on the prairie, including bison, antelope, elk, whitetail deer, plains wolves, ruffed grouse, and prairie chickens.⁵⁴ Over half the region’s annual precipitation, around twenty-four inches, falls between April and September.⁵⁵ Before European and Anglo settlement, the Osage settled and hunted in the region.⁵⁶ The Osage, the largest Native American tribe in Missouri, settled in areas south of the Missouri River and along the Osage River. Other tribes of the area migrated from the east and included the Shawnee, the Delaware, the Sac, the Fox, and the Kickapoo.⁵⁷ For settlers, the most distinguishing feature of

⁴⁶ “Moses Carver Is Dead,” 5.

⁴⁷ Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 4, and Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 17-19.

⁴⁸ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 17.

⁴⁹ Certificate No. 13837, November 1, 1839, U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁵⁰ Milton D. Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 45.

⁵¹ Timothy A. Nigh and Walter A. Schroeder, *Atlas of Missouri Ecoregions* (Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Conservation, 2002), 4, 89; see also Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri*, 10-11, 45.

⁵² Nigh and Schroeder, *Atlas of Missouri Ecoregions*, 90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Charles Callison, *Man and Wildlife in Missouri* (Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Conservation, 1981), 1-2; Walter A. Schroeder, *Presettlement Prairie of Missouri*, Natural History Series, no. 2 (Jefferson City: Missouri Department of Conservation, 1981), 2-3.

⁵⁵ Nigh and Schroeder, *Atlas of Missouri Ecoregions*, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 90; McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II*, 52-57; and Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri*, 9-13.

⁵⁷ McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II*, 52-57.

the Springfield Plain was the rolling prairie. In 1815, prairies covered 26.7 percent of Missouri and 27 percent of Newton County.⁵⁸ Although some early settlers avoided the prairies, mistakenly believing that the land was less fertile than woodlands, most farmers eventually selected homestead sites near the prairie to allow their livestock to graze on the coarse, wild grasses.⁵⁹ More importantly, the prairies were often bounded by timber and corresponding creeks, which provided ample resources for small subsistence farmers.⁶⁰

The Carvers selected a homestead near an open expanse known as Diamond Grove—so named for a timber-enclosed prairie.⁶¹ The farm was approximately two and one-half miles southwest from the small village of Diamond, which was the closest significant settlement.⁶² The homestead site had three small streams (or spring branches), one of which is today known as Carver Branch.⁶³ Another important feature of the homestead was its freshwater springs.⁶⁴ Springs were common throughout Newton County, and many settlers believed the mineral springs had “strong medicinal properties.”⁶⁵ The Carver spring, which was located at the foot of a hill about eight to ten feet from two large elm trees, provided fresh drinking water for the Carver family and would also have been utilized to refrigerate perishables, such as butter and milk.⁶⁶ Years later, George W. Carver reminisced fondly about the spring’s “blue flag, water cress and calamus.”⁶⁷

Moses Carver’s first months in Newton County would have no doubt been spent clearing land and using farming implements, such as an A-frame harrow, to prepare one or two fields for planting.⁶⁸ Concurrent with this, the Carvers—which would have certainly meant the full extended family—would have constructed a simple square or rectangular one-room cabin on a level area of ground.⁶⁹ The log cabin, which would have been constructed with native timber and chinking, possibly short-leaf pine or white and burr oak, would have been a rustic structure providing only the most rudimentary protection from the elements.⁷⁰ Field notes and a plat map

⁵⁸ Schroeder, *Presettlement Prairie of Missouri*, 7.

⁵⁹ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 33-34, and Schroeder, *Presettlement Prairie of Missouri*, 12.

⁶⁰ Schroeder, *Presettlement Prairie of Missouri*, 3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶² Paul L. Beaubien and Merrill J. Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument: The Archeological Search for George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” *Negro History Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (November 1954): 33.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴ Anna Coxe Toogood, “Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 27-28.

⁶⁵ *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1888), 199.

⁶⁶ “Interview Between Rumburg, Fuller, Elza Winter, and Sam Gilmore,” Historical Features of Moses Carver Farm, March 15, 1963, GWCNM Library, and “Tape Recorded Interview with Mrs. Eva Goodwin, Mrs. Ida Brock and Mr. Delmar Leonard Goodwin on September 22, 1957, at the Monument,” Historic Features on Carver Farm, April 13, 1959, GWCNM Library.

⁶⁷ Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 13.

⁶⁸ Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 157.

⁶⁹ Beaubien and Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument,” 36; see also Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 71-72.

⁷⁰ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 34, and John Harrington et al., “Springs of Genius,” 62.

prepared by a surveyor with the U.S. General Land Office in 1841 denoted a homestead site with a creek, two small fields, two or three cabins, and several springs.⁷¹ The surveyor further noted that the area had “rolling, mostly good high prairie soil with gravel on the surface in most places.”⁷² It is important to note, however, that the archeological remains of only one of these cabins is in the present-day confines of George Washington Carver National Monument. Paul L. Beaubien and Merrill J. Mattes, writing in the *Negro History Bulletin* in 1954, painted the scene elegantly when they noted that “the Carver farm was an obscure backwoods affair which would scarcely divert the attention of a traveler.”⁷³

The modest success of the Carvers in their first years in Missouri was also tempered by hardship. In 1839, in the midst of the migration of Richard Carver and Moses Carver to Newton County, George Carver unexpectedly died at the age of fifty-three.⁷⁴ Already widowed, he left behind three small children—Albert, age twelve; Daniel S., age eight; and Sarah Jane, age five.⁷⁵ Moses Carver and his wife, Susan, who did not have children of their own, took on the responsibility of raising their newly orphaned nephews and niece.⁷⁶ Approximately one year later, Moses Carver reported on the 1840 federal census that five free white persons lived on his homestead—himself, his wife, and three children aged fourteen and under.⁷⁷ A decade later, with the 1850 federal census, only Sarah Jane remained on the farm with Moses and Susan Carver.⁷⁸ Three years later, in 1853, Sarah Jane married William Moore Williams, a farmer. The two remained on the Carver homestead and lived in a small farmhouse near what is now known as the Williams spring with their two children, Daniel and Martha Jane.⁷⁹ Albert Carver left Newton County in 1849 and migrated to Dallas, Texas, where he remained for approximately two years. He then returned to Newton County, married Mary Markham, and went back to Texas in 1852, purchasing 250 acres of land. Daniel S. Carver left Newton County for Placerville, California, in 1850. He made money in a mining venture and eventually migrated to Texas, where he served in the Confederate army during the Civil War.⁸⁰

The Carver homestead was continuously in flux during the 1840s and 1850s as additional family members from Illinois arrived and others departed. In 1840, Abraham Carver and Solomon Carver and their immediate families, which consisted of their wives and four and five children, respectively, were also living in Newton County.⁸¹ Abraham and his family remained

⁷¹ John Harrington et al., “Springs of Genius,” 58.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Beaubien and Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument,” 34.

⁷⁴ Charles W. Porter III, “Report on an Investigation of George Washington Carver’s Birthplace at the Old ‘Diamond Grove’ Plantation Near Diamond, Newton County, Missouri,” February 24-March 5, 1943, 14, Boxes 187-188, George Washington Carver National Monument, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

⁷⁵ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 8.

⁷⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 4.

⁷⁷ “Moses Carver,” Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Marin, Newton County, Missouri, 257, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁷⁸ 1850 U.S. Census, Newton County, Missouri, Neosho Township, pp. 710-11, dwelling 464, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, obtained through Ancestry.com.

⁷⁹ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 10, and Fuller, “Moses Carver and His Family,” 15.

⁸⁰ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 8-9, 30, 37-38; see also “The Carvers of Diamond,” 13-18.

⁸¹ 1840 U.S. Census, Marin, Newton County, Missouri, 257, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

in Missouri for only a few years, however, and by 1844 they had migrated to the Republic of Texas.⁸² Other Carver family members, including William Carver and Joel Carver, the first and third children of Richard Carver and Mary Jane Simmons, left Newton County in the early 1850s.⁸³ William Carver, who was twenty-three in 1850, had homesteaded land adjacent to the Moses Carver property. Upon leaving Missouri, he traveled to California with his young wife, Frances, and their two children, George and Richard.⁸⁴ For his part, the elder Richard Carver, his wife, and their other children homesteaded in Missouri only for about a decade before migrating further west to McGee County, Kansas. The family, whose land holdings in Missouri were valued at one hundred dollars in 1850, eventually settled on the Starr Prairie near Baxter Springs.⁸⁵ Upon the elder Richard's death, in March 1873, his body was brought back to Newton County to be buried in the family cemetery.⁸⁶

The Purchase of Public Land by Moses Carver

Historian Perry McCandless described three main types of settlers in nineteenth-century Missouri: back-country farmers who squatted on public lands in more remote areas; frontier vanguards who purchased more land than they could cultivate and sold it at a profit; and stable landowners who looked to settle in Missouri permanently.⁸⁷ Moses Carver and his brothers were the first type—squatters who took advantage of the principle of preemption. The land policy, which was extended to the Missouri Territory by President James Madison on April 12, 1814, granted squatters the first right to purchase up to 160 acres of public domain land at a price of \$2.00 per acre.⁸⁸ The preemption act enabled a free white man to obtain land at an assured minimum price and modified an earlier land policy (the Ordinance of 1785) that, in essence, had forced yeoman farmers and other settlers to trespass on unsurveyed public land in hopes of acquiring the land before speculators arrived.⁸⁹ The right of preemption was upheld by the Land Act of 1820 and further legislation in 1841, which reduced the purchase price of public land to \$1.25 per acre and restricted the preemptive right to those who owned no more than 320 acres of land.⁹⁰ Preemption also allowed settlers to break and farm land before surveying was done by the U.S. General Land Office—a process that was often slow and tedious.⁹¹

⁸² Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 16.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 28, and “The Carvers of Diamond,” 13-18.

⁸⁴ “William Carver,” Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 710, dwelling 463, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁸⁵ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 17-18; see also “Richard Carver,” Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 710, dwelling 462, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁸⁶ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 14.

⁸⁷ McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II*, 41-42.

⁸⁸ Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 43-44.

⁸⁹ Roy M. Robbins, “Preemption—A Frontier Triumph,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18, no. 3 (December 1931): 331-32.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 339, 348-49, and “The Preemption Act of 1841,” 27th Cong., ch. 16, 5 Stat. 453 (1841).

⁹¹ Schroeder, *Presettlement Prairie of Missouri*, 4.

In February 1843, the public land in Section 7 of Township 26-N, Range 31-W, Fifth Meridian, in Newton County, was offered for sale.⁹² On March 6, 1843, Moses Carver took legal possession of the first piece of land he had been squatting—the north half of the southeast quarter and the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 7.⁹³ Approximately seven months later, on October 11, 1843, Moses obtained possession of the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 7.⁹⁴ Moses received a patent on both pieces of land, that is, the legal document transferring land ownership from the federal government to an individual, on June 1, 1845.⁹⁵ This provided Moses with a total of 160 acres.

Over the course of the next eight years, Moses expanded his land holdings through an additional preemption possession and a property transfer from his brother. Beginning on September 9, 1844, Moses also purchased by warranty deed the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 7 from Richard S. Carver.⁹⁶ Moses obtained the 40 acres for \$50.00, or \$1.25 per acre, a price that was most likely below its commercial and speculative value.⁹⁷ In October 1850, Moses estimated the value of his real estate holdings at \$400.⁹⁸ He completed the acquisition of his homestead site in February 1852 when he entered into possession of the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 7.⁹⁹ On April 15, 1853, Moses received a patent from the U.S. General Land Office for these 40 acres.¹⁰⁰ Approximately sixteen years after migrating to Missouri, Moses and Susan Carver owned 240 acres of land. More telling, according to the 1860 federal census, the real estate was now valued at \$3,000.¹⁰¹

Agricultural Production and Farm Improvements

The predominant crop cultivated on the Moses Carver farm during the 1840s and 1850s was Indian corn (or maize). Corn served as a staple crop of subsistence farmers in Missouri for several reasons: it was easy to plant, required no milling for consumption, was a key ingredient of many traditional dishes, could be used as livestock feed if necessary, and was stored easily.¹⁰² In 1850, Moses reported on agricultural schedules that accompanied the federal census that he

⁹² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 4. See also *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties*, 229.

Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II, 1820 to 1860* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971, 2000), 35.

⁹³ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Certificate No. 6913, June 1, 1845, U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907, accessed from Ancestry.com, and Certificate No. 7011, June 1, 1845, U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907, accessed from Ancestry.com.

⁹⁶ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 7-8.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ “Moses Carver,” Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Marion, Newton, Missouri, pp. 710-11, dwelling 464, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁹⁹ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 8.

¹⁰⁰ Certificate No. 12520, April 15, 1853, U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907, accessed from Ancestry.com.

¹⁰¹ “Moses Carver,” 1860 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 95, dwelling 628, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

¹⁰² Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 98, and Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 157.

had cultivated fifteen hundred bushels of Indian corn during the previous year.¹⁰³ Other crops planted and harvested included oats (five hundred bushels), wheat (fifty bushels), Irish potatoes (ten bushels), hay (one ton), and flax (twenty pounds).¹⁰⁴ This crop mix was most likely for personal consumption and for use as feed for animals, although excess yields certainly would have been offered into the local market or farther abroad.¹⁰⁵ The 1850 federal census also indicated that the Moses Carver farm had a substantial number of livestock, including horses (twenty-one total), milch cows (six total), asses and mules (two total), sheep (fifteen total), swine (thirty total), working oxen (four total), and other cattle (eleven total), which were valued at \$966.¹⁰⁶ Like other Missouri farmers, Carver kept hogs for pork, while the sheep would have been raised both as a meat source and for their wool.¹⁰⁷ In 1850, for example, the Moses Carver farm produced forty pounds of wool.¹⁰⁸ It was also reported, in oral histories of family associates conducted by the National Park Service in the 1950s, that Moses Carver was an accomplished breeder of horses, which contributed to “much of his wealth in later years.”¹⁰⁹ Although this could not be confirmed, the large number of horses maintained on the homestead, a total of twenty-one in 1850, seemed to support the claim that he had some interest in horse breeding either for driving and draft teams or, as was alleged, horse racing. Elza Winter, who was born in 1891 and lived on a farm adjacent to the Carvers, recalled that Moses Carver cultivated corn and oats for horse feed and also grew pumpkin-shaped gourds for use as water containers and sugar containers.¹¹⁰ In addition to planting crops and raising livestock, as well as maintaining the corresponding fields and pastures that each required, Carver also established a large walnut orchard and apple orchard on his property.¹¹¹ The walnut grove was particularly noteworthy and eventually included upward of five hundred trees by the mid-1880s.¹¹² Finally, Moses Carver and his family also benefited from the prairie and woodlands that interspersed their farm and provided, if one was a careful and accurate shot, deer, geese, ducks, quail, and other small game animals.¹¹³

¹⁰³ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 49.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 34-35, 49, 56, 94; see also Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 65-67.

¹⁰⁶ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 49.

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 49.

¹⁰⁹ Porter, “George Washington Carver's Birthplace,” 4.

¹¹⁰ Robert P. Fuller, “Notes from Interview with Mr. Elza Winter,” July 25, 1955, GWCNM Library; “Interview with Elza Winter Sr.,” November 15, 1953, G.W. Carver Contemporaries, GWCNM Library; and Fuller, “Moses Carver and His Family,” 2.

¹¹¹ Porter, “George Washington Carver's Birthplace,” 9.

¹¹² Ibid., 3-4.

¹¹³ Hersey, *An Environmental Biography*, 12.



Figure 3. Moses Carver on a farm in Galena, Kansas, circa 1905. *George Washington Carver National Monument*.

During the 1840s and 1850s, Moses Carver and his family continued to improve the farm. The first log cabin, which was constructed shortly after their arrival in the late 1830s, would have been supplemented by other log or timber structures, such as outhouses and privies, stock sheds

and pens, fences, smokehouses, and a barn, as farming activities matured on the homestead.¹¹⁴ The exact types and locations of these improvements are not known, but the large number of livestock, a total of eighty-nine head in 1850, for example, implied that stock sheds or pens would have been constructed to assist with feeding activities and slaughtering, and to protect the animals during winter months or from natural predators such as wolves.¹¹⁵ In addition, certain livestock, such as cattle, horses, and sheep, would have required fenced pastures, protected by stone walls, timber fencing, or, later, barbed wire, to allow the animals to graze during the more temperate seasons and thus reduce the amount of animal feed needed.¹¹⁶ Other historians, such as Anna Coxe Toogood, opined that the Carvers may have also constructed a cider press shed and a smokehouse on the homestead—the former to press apples into cider and the latter to help “preserve cuts of hog and cattle from the stock slaughtered and dressed on the farm.”¹¹⁷ By far the most important structure on the farm, however, was the barn. This structure would have been used by Moses Carver as a year-round workspace, storage area, and shelter for his livestock. Elza Winter reported in an interview conducted during the 1950s that the original Carver barn was of log composition with two rooms situated about ten feet apart and joined by a covered shed. Winter further stated that Moses Carver used the driveway of the barn, at least in later years, to store his linchpin wagon.¹¹⁸ George W. Carver, writing in July 1931, also remembered the “big” barn on the property during his childhood in the 1860s. According to Carver, he often spent afternoons in the loft “shelling corn to carry to the mill to be ground into meal.”¹¹⁹

Moses and Susan Carver also set aside land on their farm for use as a small family burial plot. The cemetery, which is located in the southeast quarter of Section 7 of Township 26-N, Range 31-W, and is still extant in the national monument, was originally surrounded by a four-foot dry stone wall, which Moses Carver apparently constructed himself.¹²⁰ Between 1835 and 1858, six family members were interred in the cemetery: Charity Dunn (d. October 10, 1835), George Carver (d. 1839), Rachel Carver (d. August 1839), Elizabeth Carver (d. October 1848), Brenager Carver (d. August 1850), and Malinda Carver (d. August 13, 1858).¹²¹ Although the oldest grave in the cemetery is dated 1835, it may have predated the migration of the Carvers to Missouri, or could represent a memorial rather than a burial.¹²² Another possibility is that Charity Dunn was interred sometime after the formal settlement of the homestead.¹²³ Over the course of the next fifty years, at least fourteen other family members, including Moses Carver, were buried in the cemetery with modest marble grave markers. For his part, Moses, or a

¹¹⁴ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 73.

¹¹⁵ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 37-40.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹¹⁸ Robert P. Fuller, “Interview with Elza Winter,” July 25, 1955, GWCNM Carver Dwellings, Original Buildings on the Moses Carver Plantation, GWCNM Library.

¹¹⁹ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁰ Fuller, “Moses Carver and His Family,” 7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 8; see also Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 14.

¹²² John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen have argued that the earliest graves in the Carver cemetery were probably originally marked by only “fieldstone or wooden planks.” The use of professionally carved monuments and memorials was something which was probably done later. See John Harrington et al., “Springs of Genius,” 26-28.

¹²³ Fuller, “Moses Carver and His Family,” 8.

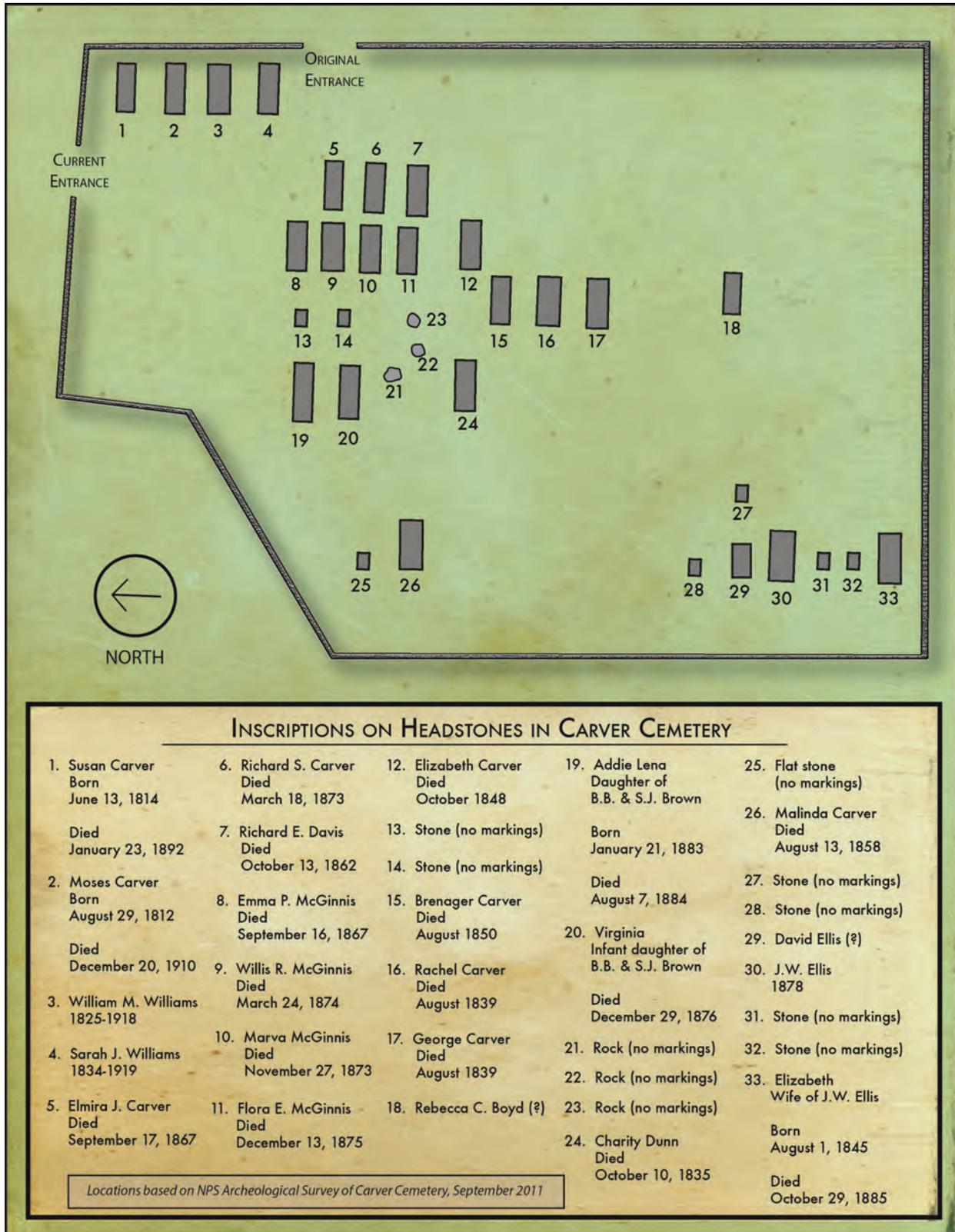


Figure 4. Map of the Carver Cemetery.

family member, selected the following epitaph for his gravestone, which was erected upon his death on December 20, 1910:

Friends and strangers as you pas [*sic*] by
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now—so you will be
Prepare for death and follow me.¹²⁴

The poem, which was popular during the late 1800s and which was, with minor variation, a fixture of gravestones during the period, was intended to remind surviving family and visitors of the transience and impermanence of life.¹²⁵ The pattern of interments in the cemetery is also interesting. The original entrance of the cemetery was on the east, and all graves display an east-west orientation, that is, the dead were buried with their feet directed to the east. This eastward orientation, or in Latin, *ad orientem*, follows the Christian practice of orientating churches and cathedrals toward the sunrise—a custom symbolizing the resurrection and second coming of Jesus Christ.¹²⁶ In addition, the cemetery is organized into several family clusters representing the extended families of George Carver, Richard Carver, and Moses Carver, descendants.¹²⁷

By the mid-1850s, Moses Carver, who was then forty-three, had become a successful landowner and farmer. During his first fifteen years in Newton County, Moses and his extended family had cleared and improved upward of one hundred acres.¹²⁸ The diversified farm, which consisted of cultivated farmland, timberland, and prairie, was, by all accounts, a successful undertaking that enabled Moses and his family to become self-sufficient and eventually quite prosperous.¹²⁹ The family, like other Missouri farmers, survived on the fruits of their labor and sold surplus crops, vegetables, produce, and meat to the local market.¹³⁰ In later years, rumors persisted that Moses Carver had accumulated a substantial fortune that he “exchanged for gold and hid in various hiding places” on his farm.¹³¹ Although this is no doubt fictional, it does speak to the success that the Carvers achieved in the years after they migrated to Missouri. It also speaks to another Carver family trait—eccentricity. Indeed, Moses Carver was remembered as a peculiar individual who had “an uncanny rapport with animals; a pet rooster perched on his shoulders and squirrels ate from his hand.”¹³² Although he was a Freemason, and thus supposedly believed in God, Carver was known as someone who refused to attend church and rather sought seclusion on his farm.¹³³ Forbes Harris Brown, who lived near the Carver homestead and was a childhood friend of George W. Carver, reported that families in Diamond

¹²⁴ Danner, *A History of Christian Carver*, 31.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31; see, for example, <http://www.historyfromheadstones.com/index.php?id=765>, accessed February 15, 2013.

¹²⁶ John Harrington et al., “Springs of Genius,” 32.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32-36.

¹²⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 5.

¹²⁹ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 9, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 5.

¹³⁰ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 94.

¹³¹ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 4.

¹³² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

regularly attended services at Locust Grove, but Moses never participated.¹³⁴ Less is known about Susan Carver, although she was described as “less peculiar, but rather quiet, withdrawn, and old-fashioned.”¹³⁵ In any case, the Moses Carver farm was not a large Southern plantation—nor would it ever be. Daily chores and farm work would have been completed by Moses, Susan, their nephews and niece, and perhaps one or two hired laborers.¹³⁶ Yet, there was one distinct decision that spoke volumes and also emphasized the burgeoning wealth of the farm—on October 9, 1855, Moses Carver purchased a slave.

¹³⁴ Forbes Harris Brown, Correspondence to Aubrey Neasham, National Park Service, May 20, 1952, 1, Record Group 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

¹³⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 7.

¹³⁶ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 93.

Chapter Two

THE ENSLAVEMENT OF MARY, JAMES, AND GEORGE

When an approximately thirteen-year-old enslaved African American girl named Mary arrived on the Carver farm in October 1855 after being purchased by Moses Carver from William P. McGinnis, she joined an archetypal rural family in antebellum Missouri. The Carvers maintained a self-sufficient and productive homestead that, by 1860, generated the seventh highest cash value of thirty-seven farms operating in Marion Township. But as Missouri became embroiled in the rising sectional tensions in the 1850s over whether to admit Kansas as a slave state or a free state, Moses Carver found that being a prosperous landowner in a southwest Missouri county that bordered Kansas had its hazards. The secession crisis that culminated on December 20, 1860, with the departure of South Carolina from the Union, and the outbreak of the Civil War less than three months later, would soon leave their mark on Moses Carver, his farm, and an enslaved boy later known as George W. Carver.

The Institution of Slavery in Antebellum Missouri

The slave trade arrived in Missouri, then known as the Louisiana Territory, with the French, who brought the first African slaves into the region in 1720 to work in Mine La Motte in present-day Madison County.¹ During French—and later Spanish—rule, slaves were regularly utilized for an array of duties including mining, farming, domestic labor, hunting, trapping, and driving boats along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. With the transfer of the Louisiana Territory and Upper Louisiana to the United States in 1803 and 1804, respectively, and the placement of the District of Louisiana under the jurisdiction of the Indiana Territory, where slavery had been prohibited, American settlers began expressing concern that the United States might prohibit slavery in the recently acquired territories.² In 1804, however, Upper Louisiana gained territorial status and introduced a slave code patterned after that of Virginia.³ In March 1820, with the passage of the Missouri Compromise, Missouri was admitted into the Union as a slave state and Maine became a free state. More importantly, slavery would be prohibited in the Louisiana Territory north of latitude 36° 30′ with the exception of Missouri.⁴ That same year, the institution of slavery was ratified in the Missouri Constitution of 1820, which granted residents the right to own slave property and declared that no slave could be emancipated

¹ Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 19, 316n5.

² Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 19-25; Harrison Anthony Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865" (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 1914), 57-58; William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 6-7, 25-26, 78-79, 114, 117, 131-40; and R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 24-27.

³ Trexler, "Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865," 59; see also Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 23. For more information on Missouri's slave code, see Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 245-48.

⁴ Perry McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II, 1820 to 1860* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971, 2000), 5; Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 12.

“without the consent of their owners, or without paying them, before such emancipation, a full equivalent for such slaves so emancipated.”⁵

During the antebellum period, most Missourians supported the institution of slavery.⁶ According to Diane Mutti Burke, the institution served as both “a system of labor and [of] social and racial control.”⁷ Slavery’s popularity in Missouri was due in large part to the central role it played in the economy.⁸ Slavery provided Missouri farmers and tradesmen, both slaveholding and non-slaveholding, with a critical workforce. Enslaved men and women could be found throughout the state during the 1850s working to cultivate wheat and corn; break and cut hemp; raise tobacco, oats, flax, feed grasses, fruits, vegetables, and livestock; and shear sheep.⁹ Sarah Graves, a former slave, described her typical duties:

I worked in the fields, and I worked hard too. Plantin’ and harvistin’ in those days was really work. They used oxen to break up the ground for corn, an’ for plowin’ it too. They hoed corn with a hoe, and cut the stalks with a hoe and shocked ’em. They cut the grain with the cradle and bound it with their hands, and shocked it. They threshed the grain with a hickory stick. Beating it out.¹⁰

In addition, enslaved labor provided farmers and tradesmen with flexibility in adjusting their labor force to seasonal demands.¹¹ Slaves were hired out during periods of slack demand and between harvests. This allowed lessees access to a temporary labor force and provided bondholders with an additional income stream. Of course, those African Americans who were enslaved in Missouri enjoyed neither freedom nor liberty. Enslaved individuals were subjugated and disenfranchised, they received no payment for their work, they could own no personal property without permission of their bondholder, they could not marry or leave under their own free volition, and they often suffered physical and emotional degradation and abuse. Slavery and liberty, in the words of Charles Sumner, a Massachusetts abolitionist, were two conflicting propositions: “Where slavery is, there Liberty cannot be; and where Liberty is, there Slavery cannot be.”

⁵ Trexler, “Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865,” 58-59.

⁶ Those Missourians who opposed slavery were mainly German Radicals centered in St. Louis. See, for example, William E. Parrish, *A History of Missouri. Volume III 1860 to 1875* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 147, and Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 263.

⁷ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 28, 49.

⁹ Trexler, “Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865,” 22-25; Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 93-95; and “Slavery,” in *Missouri Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavers in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 108.

¹⁰ Sarah Graves, “Still Carries Scars from Lashes,” in *Missouri Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavers in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 131.

¹¹ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 92.

Unlike the plantation culture of the Deep South, the institution of slavery in Missouri was more nuanced.¹² Small farms, rather than large cotton plantations, dominated the landscape and served as the centerpiece of the agrarian economy.¹³ As a result, slavery was adapted by Missourians to meet this unique society. Slavery emerged as mainly a small-scale and domestic institution similar to that found in northern Kentucky. Few slaveholders owned more than five or ten slaves, and most farmers could afford to own only one enslaved person—typically a woman or young girl who provided both domestic and field labor.¹⁴ The majority of enslaved African Americans were household servants and farmhands who spent their days laboring in the same fields as their owners and their families.¹⁵ At the same time, however, slaveholding in Missouri, like elsewhere, was viewed as a sign of status and wealth. Diane Mutti Burke observed that “slaveholders were the upper echelon of Missouri society, commanding the greatest wealth through their ownership of land and slaves.”¹⁶

The actual number of enslaved people in Missouri varied greatly over time, but in numerical terms, slavery reached its peak in 1840 when almost 385,000 enslaved people were living in the state. As a percentage of the population, it was a staggering number—more than half of all men, women, and children who lived in Missouri were enslaved. Ten years later, the number of enslaved people had declined to approximately 87,000, before rising to 114,000 in 1860. In Newton County, where Moses Carver’s farm was situated, there were 3,790 enslaved people in 1840, which represented 51 percent of the population. However, the total number of slaves declined over the next two decades, and by 1860 there were only 241 slaves living in Newton County. This decline in the number of enslaved individuals does not mean that support for the institution of slavery had receded within the county. Robert W. Duffner has observed that the total number of enslaved people was extremely elastic and often fluctuated to reflect changing economic conditions.¹⁷ Other scholars have noted that Missouri’s enslaved population was often largest during the initial phases of settlement and then declined as the need for agricultural labor was reduced.¹⁸ It is also important to note that many Missouri counties saw net increases in their enslaved populations between 1850 and 1860 as slaveholders and bondpeople coalesced in communities that were more supportive of the institution.¹⁹ Finally, the small-scale nature of slavery in Missouri should not be misunderstood as something that was perhaps more benevolent or compassionate than the plantation-based slavery that operated in the Deep South.²⁰ Slavery in Missouri was both brutal and violent—as it was throughout the United States.

¹² Stephen Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 9, 49-51, 105, 131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131; see also John G. Haskell, “Slavery in Western Missouri,” *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society* 7 (1902): 31.

¹⁶ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 234.

¹⁷ Robert W. Duffner, “Slavery in Missouri River Counties, 1820-1865” (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1974), 7-10, 28-47.

¹⁸ Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 217-23.

¹⁹ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 5.

²⁰ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 1-2, 6.

Year	Location	Population	Free Whites	Free Blacks	Slaves	Slaves as % of Population
1830	Missouri	140,455	114,795	569	25,091	17.8%
1840	Missouri	709,164	323,888	1,574	383,702	54.1%
1840	Newton County	7,409	3,615	4	3,790	51.1%
1850	Missouri	682,044	592,004	2,618	87,422	12.8%
1850	Newton County	4,268	4,012	15	241	5.6%
1860	Missouri	1,181,112	1,063,509	3,572	114,031	9.6%
1860	Newton County	9,319	8,842	51	426	4.5%

Figure 5. Slaves in Missouri and Newton County, 1830 to 1860.²¹

The Purchase of Mary by Moses and Susan Carver

It was within this world that Moses and Susan Carver purchased an enslaved African American girl named Mary on October 9, 1855.²² The young girl, who was born circa 1842, was presented by her owner as being approximately thirteen years old. The purchase price, seven hundred dollars, was not insignificant and further confirmed the fact that the Carvers had joined the more upwardly and affluent social class. Moses Carver and his wife were now part of a select fraternity in Marion Township, which was part of Newton County. In 1860, they were one of only five slaveholders in a community that had almost four hundred residents.²³ Possibly to mark this occasion, or perhaps to serve as proof in case his new slave attempted to flee north, Moses retained the handwritten bill of sale he received upon purchasing Mary. In later years, the document became one of George W. Carver's most prized possessions. Writing to Mrs. M. B. Goenell on February 18, 1939, the scientist/educator noted "in answer to your letter of recent date, I wish to say that I own even a more precious document than that which you possess, as I have the bill of sale of my own dear Mother."²⁴

Little is known about Mary's life before she arrived on the Moses Carver farm. According to oral testimony provided by Roy Porter, the grandnephew of Moses Carver, Moses purchased Mary from William P. McGinnis to "liquidate a preexisting debt."²⁵ McGinnis, who

²¹ Data obtained from the Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Duff Green, 1832), 41; U.S. Department of State, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), 88-90; U.S. Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850, An Appendix* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 655; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of The United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of The Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 285-87. Newton County was founded in 1838; thus, federal census data did not provide a breakdown for Newton County in 1830. The 1840 Compendium only provided aggregate data for whites and free blacks by sex and age. This was totaled to obtain the total number of whites and free blacks in Missouri and Newton County.

²² "Bill of Sale showing Moses Carver purchased George Carver's mother for \$700," October 9, 1855, Vertical Files, George Washington Carver Collection, Tuskegee University Archives.

²³ "1860 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules," entry for Marion Township, Newton County, Missouri, accessed through Ancestry.com (July 9, 1860), and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of The United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of The Eighth Census, Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 295.

²⁴ G. W. Carver to Mrs. M. B. Goenell, February 18, 1939, Reel 27, Frame 1125, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁵ Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," November 26, 1957, 5, George Washington Carver National Monument Library, Diamond, Missouri (hereafter GWCNM Library).

was forty years old in 1855, was a farmer in Newton County and lived with his wife Pamela and three sons—Noble, Mathew, and Andrew. In 1850, McGinnis owned real estate valued at \$2,500.²⁶ Others, including Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, who investigated the issue in the late 1950s, suggested that Moses purchased Mary directly from a neighbor and McGinnis “merely performed a notary function.”²⁷ Linda O. McMurry, in her biography of George W. Carver, also implied that Moses purchased Mary from a neighbor—although the specific individual was not named.²⁸ Paris Boyd, who was a contemporary of George W. Carver and grew up near the Carver farm, suggested William G. Baynham as the original owner of Mary.²⁹

Figure 6. Bill of Sale for the purchase of Mary, October 9, 1855. *George Washington Carver National Monument*.

A close reading of the bill of sale seems to confirm that William P. McGinnis was more than just the notary or recorder of the sale. The document clearly states that the undersigned, either John Dade Jr. or McGinnis, warranted that the slave girl was “sound in body and mind and a slave for life.” This type of legal language was something that slave owners utilized to guarantee their property.³⁰ Dade is clearly listed as the witness for the sale; thus, McGinnis would have had to have been the seller, which was further confirmed by the addition of both his signature and seal on the purchase instrument. This new reading of the document is further supported by the fact that McGinnis owned seven slaves, six male and one female, ranging in age

²⁶ “William P. McGinnis,” Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 330, dwelling 127, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-DC), accessed through Ancestry.com.

²⁷ Fuller and Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” 5.

²⁸ Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist & Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 5.

²⁹ Robert P. Fuller, “An Interview with Mr. Paris Boyd Born Sept. 24, 1867,” Moses Carver Family, February 11, 1954, GWCNM Library.

³⁰ Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 237.

from two through twenty-one, in September 1850 as reported on the federal census slave schedule for Newton County.³¹ Although an eight-year-old African American girl was not listed, she could certainly have been obtained by McGinnis in the intervening five years and then sold to Moses Carver in October 1855.

Of course, Moses could have also purchased Mary from a slave trader or local bondsman. During the 1850s, enslaved people were readily available for purchase throughout Missouri from bondsmen or slave traders, or at slave markets.³² St. Louis, for example, had several slave auction blocks and served as a regional center for the slave trade, supplying enslaved labor locally and into the Southern states.³³ In 1859, Bernard M. Lynch conducted slave auctions at 100 Locust Street, and Corbin Thompson held sales of enslaved African Americans at 3 South Sixth Street. The city also had two slave pens, that is, holding areas for enslaved people, at Broadway and Clark Streets and at Fifth and Myrtle Streets.³⁴ Roy Porter, the grandnephew of Moses Carver, later maintained that Moses had opposed slavery for religious reasons and had “hoped that his ownership of a slave would not be written in heaven against him at the time of his death.”³⁵ Although Moses Carver and his wife may have opposed slavery on religious or philosophical grounds, there is no documentary evidence that supports this claim other than potentially biased oral testimony offered decades later by family descendants. Indeed, the historical and documentary record appears to support the opposite assertion—that Moses and Susan Carver both supported and participated in the institution of slavery in Missouri.³⁶

Mary and Her Children

Mary’s first child, named James (sometimes referred to as Jim), was born on October 10, 1859, according to information listed on a grave marker erected nearly twenty-four years later.³⁷ In early July 1860, James was described by Thomas Wright, a census enumerator, as a seven-month-old mulatto boy, although on later federal censuses he was listed as black.³⁸ James’s father is not known, although Anna Coxe Toogood speculated that he may have been Jackson Carroll, a twenty-two-year-old white farm laborer who was living on the Carver farm in 1860.³⁹

³¹ 1850 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule, District 63, Newton County, Missouri, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

³² For more information on slave traders in Missouri, see Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery*, 230-40.

³³ Trexler, “Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865,” 45-53, and Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 123-24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “Interview with Roy Porter,” Slave Girl Mary, October 28, 1957, GWCNM Library; “Interview with Roy C. Porter,” Vendor of the Slave Girl Mary, April 9, 1958, GWCNM Library; “Interview with Roy Porter,” Mose Carver’s Masonic Affiliation, October 28, 1957, GWCNM Library; “Interview with Roy C. Porter,” Vendor of the Slave Girl Mary, April 9, 1958, GWCNM Library.

³⁶ On Carver’s supposed philosophical opposition to slavery, see McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 5.

³⁷ Ann White to J. P. Guzman, June 1, 1948, Reel 58, Frame 0252, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁸ “1860 U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules,” entry for Slave Inhabitants in Marion Township, Newton County, July 9, 1860, 1, accessed through Ancestry.com. The term “mulatto” was utilized to indicate that James had mixed ancestry, that is, one white and one black parent. It is also important to note that neither Mary nor James was listed by name on the slave schedule—once again indicating their role as property.

³⁹ “Moses Carver,” 1860 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p.95, dwelling 628, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com; see also Charles W. Porter III, “Report on an Investigation of George Washington Carver’s Birthplace at the Old ‘Diamond Grove’ Plantation Near Diamond,

Of course, Moses Carver, or any other male family member or neighbor, either white or black, could have served as James's father.⁴⁰ Little is known of Mary's pregnancy or the conditions surrounding James's birth, although it can be assumed that either Susan Carver or a local midwife assisted in the infant's delivery. As a child, and later teenager, James was described as a "tall, robust, and husky youngster who very early assumed a number of chores."⁴¹ James certainly worked with Mary and other farm laborers in the fields and probably also assisted with shearing sheep, milking cows, and shelling corn.⁴² James lived on the Carver farm through emancipation, and at least through June 1880, when he was listed on the federal census as a twenty-one-year-old hired hand and farmworker.⁴³ Little is known of James's treatment as an enslaved child, but it was reported that Susan Carver often counseled James that he could turn white "if he worked hard and sweated."⁴⁴ On June 14, 1883, at the age of twenty-three, James died from smallpox while working as a plasterer in Seneca, Missouri.⁴⁵

There were rumors that Mary may have also had two, or possibly three, daughters. Little information is known about these girls beyond vague statements made by George W. Carver as an adult. In 1897, Carver wrote that he "had three sisters and one brother I know to be dead only as history tells me, yet I do not doubt it as they are buried in the family burying ground."⁴⁶ Twenty-five years later, George W. Carver mentioned his sisters again, stating that "my only two sisters died and were buried."⁴⁷ Ethel Edwards, an early biographer, hypothesized that the girls may have died from a whooping cough epidemic—the same one that sickened George W. Carver as a baby.⁴⁸ Another biographer, Lawrence Elliott, writing in 1966, indicated that one girl was named Melissa.⁴⁹ In both cases, however, no historical documentation was included or referenced to support the claims. Although there is one gravestone in the Carver cemetery from the late 1850s, Malinda Carver who died on August 13, 1858, it is generally believed that she was not the enslaved daughter of Mary but rather one of several extended Carver family members who were interred in the cemetery with Moses Carver's consent.⁵⁰ Others, however, notably John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen, have raised doubts

Newton County, Missouri," February 24-March 5, 1943, 15, Boxes 187-188, George Washington Carver National Monument, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

⁴⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 9; see also Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 2. For more information on the complexity of sexual relationships between enslaved women and their bondholders, see Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 187-92.

⁴¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 13.

⁴² Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 7.

⁴³ "Moses Carver," Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 22, dwelling 193, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Elza Winter Sr., in front of Superintendent's Office," G.W. Carver Contemporaries, November 15, 1953, GWCNM Library.

⁴⁵ George Washington Carver, "A Brief Sketch of My Life," ca. 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0012, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Library of Congress; see also Ann White to J. P. Guzman, June 1, 1948, Reel 58, Frame 0252, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶ A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd," Reel 1, Frame 0007, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

⁴⁸ Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (Cincinnati: Psyche Press, 1976), 5.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Elliott, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 9-10.

⁵⁰ Robert P. Fuller, "Report on Project #4: Moses Carver and His Family," October 18, 1955, 8, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, GWC National Monument Park; see also Porter, "George Washington Carver's Birthplace," 14.

about this narrative, hypothesizing that the location of the grave—isolated from the other family members and along the western edge of the cemetery—suggests ostracism or some other marginalization.⁵¹

Mary's second child, known as George, and who later took the name George W. Carver and was known internationally as the acclaimed Tuskegee Institute scientist George Washington Carver, was born circa 1865, quite possibly in either the winter or spring.⁵² Throughout most of his lifetime, Carver believed that he had been born in 1865. On June 21, 1888, for example, while homesteading in Ness County, Kansas, Carver appeared before N. S. Calhoun, the Clerk of District Court. During the proceeding, which was conducted under oath, Carver stated that his age was twenty-three, which provides an approximate birth date of 1865.⁵³ Approximately ten years later, in 1897, Carver wrote in a short biographical sketch that "as nearly as I can trace my history I was about 2 weeks old when the . . . [Civil War] closed."⁵⁴ Carver also referenced his 1865 birth date in the biographical sketch printed in *The Bomb*, the 1896 class yearbook for Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts (now Iowa State University).⁵⁵

The exact month and day of the birth, however, has confounded biographers and has emerged, in some ways, as a parlor game among Carver enthusiasts. Peter Burchard, who investigated the issue for the National Park Service in 2005, has noted that Carver believed the month and day to be "sometime about the twelfth of July."⁵⁶ Burchard cites correspondence between Carver and Floyd C. Shoemaker, the secretary of the State Historical Society of Missouri, on December 21, 1935. Interestingly, in later years, Carver seemed evasive on the subject of his age. In March 1939, Ernie Pyle, the popular American journalist and future war correspondent, asked Carver whether he had been born in 1861—a key date as it would imply that Carver had been born enslaved. Carver's response was both oblique and contradictory: "I don't know. I was born into slavery. I was chattel. We were all chattels. . . . I don't know how old I am."⁵⁷ On July 19, 1943, Rackham Holt communicated with Frank Campsall at the Ford Motor Company about the issue, noting "Mr. Ford may be interested to know that I have at last authenticated the year in which Dr. Carver was born. According to the U.S. Census, it was 1860,

⁵¹ John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen, "Springs of Genius: An Integrated Management Plan for George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri," February 1999, 36, prepared for the National Park Service, Midwest Region, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁵² See Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 1, McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 9-10, and "George Carver," Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 444, dwelling 293, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁵³ "Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof," June 21, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

⁵⁴ The Civil War ended with the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. See A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd," Reel 1, Frame 0007, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁵ Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, *The Bomb*, 1895, 55, Box 006.001, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

⁵⁶ Peter Burchard, "George Washington Carver's Birthdate," January 28, 2005, GWCNM Library.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

and not 1864 as he surmised.”⁵⁸ In 1957, two historians at the National Park Service, after conducting six years of research, pronounced July 12, 1860, as George W. Carver’s birth date—a date subsequently recognized by Congress.⁵⁹ Their finding was based on a review of federal census data from 1860 and 1870. However, in 1973, Anna Coxe Toogood reevaluated the evidence and argued that the date of birth was much later, circa 1864–65.⁶⁰ By far the best assessment of the issue comes from Linda O. McMurry, who has opined: “Claims have been made for a Carver birthday from 1860 to 1865, and there is documentary evidence to support each. Nevertheless, after examining all the material, I believe that Carver was born in the winter or spring of 1865.”⁶¹ For his part, George W. Carver also seemed resigned to the fact that his exact birth date had been lost to history. Writing on January 24, 1941, to C. H. Pearson, he concluded that “this is all that is known about my early life. I presume it is difficult for you to appreciate the fact that a slave child was nothing but chattel and no record was kept of their birth.”⁶²

Like many enslaved children in Missouri, George W. Carver had no recollection of his father.⁶³ Carver believed that he was an enslaved African American owned by James Grant. Grant operated a farm in Buffalo Township, Newton County, a short distance from the Moses Carver farm. In 1860, Grant owned four slaves, two of whom were male, aged twenty and thirty-five, respectively.⁶⁴ At some point, George W. Carver was told that his biological father had been “killed while hauling wood with an ox team.”⁶⁵ According to Carver, “in some way he fell from the load, under the wagon, both wheels passing over him.”⁶⁶ Mary Lou Ella Boyd Hardin, an acquaintance of Moses and Susan Carver who was born in 1858 and lived in Diamond, also believed that Carver’s father was Grant’s slave.⁶⁷ Although the Catholic Church regularly married enslaved men and women, and other couples entered into matrimony through folk ceremonies, slave marriages were not formally recognized under Missouri law until 1865.⁶⁸ Mary may have entered into an informal relationship with Carver’s father through a union known

⁵⁸ Mrs. Rackham Holt to Frank Campsall, Esq., July 19, 1943, George Washington Carver Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁵⁹ Fuller and Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” 5-11. On April 22, 1952, the 82nd Congress issued House Joint Resolution 429, which designated April 5 and July 12 as the official birthdays of Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver, respectively.

⁶⁰ A detailed account of the birth date controversy is provided in Anna Coxe Toogood, “Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 8-21; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 9-10.

⁶¹ Linda O. McMurry, “George Washington Carver and the Challenges of Biography,” *Vitae Scholasticae* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 6.

⁶² G. W. Carver to C. H. Pearson, January 24, 1941, Reel 36, Frame 0251, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶³ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 230.

⁶⁴ 1860 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule, District 63, Buffalo Township, Newton, Missouri, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁶⁵ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Jessie P. Guzman, “Interview with Mrs. Mary Lou Ella Boyd Hardin,” G.W. Carver Contemporaries, May 26, 1948, GWCNM Library.

⁶⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 10; see also Trexler, “Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865,” 87-88, and Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 204.

as an “abroad” marriage, so named because each spouse lived on a different farm, although it is more likely that she did not.⁶⁹ Although George W. Carver certainly lamented not having a father, publicly he was not bitter. In 1937, at the age of approximately seventy-two, Carver wrote that “destiny so fixed it that I should know neither father nor mother, but I am thankful that all through life I have had good friends . . . to keep me in the right path.”⁷⁰

The Slave Quarters on the Moses Carver Farm

In 1860, Moses and Susan Carver were forty-eight and forty-six years old, respectively. They owned two slaves, Mary and James, although the latter was still an infant.⁷¹ They also employed a white farm laborer named Jackson Carroll who had been born in Missouri in 1838.⁷² The predominant crop cultivated on the Carver farm continued to be Indian corn (one thousand bushels). In addition, the Carvers planted and harvested oats (two hundred bushels) and hay (two tons) and produced honey (two hundred pounds), beeswax (twelve pounds), and wool (twenty-four pounds).⁷³ Moses Carver also continued to have a substantial number of livestock, including horses (eleven total), milch cows (four total), asses and mules (three total), sheep (eleven total), swine (fifteen total), and other cattle (ten total), which were valued at \$1,110, although the aggregate number of head had dropped from eighty-nine to fifty-four during the preceding decade.⁷⁴ The value of the Carver farm was estimated at \$3,000, and Moses and Susan’s personal estate was estimated at \$3,964.⁷⁵

On a typical day, Mary would likely have been responsible for cooking, cleaning, laundering, and sewing. Betty Brown, a former slave in Missouri, remembered that her mother did all the cooking and, by spinning, weaving, and sewing, made all the clothes for the household.⁷⁶ Mary was probably also tasked with feeding livestock, helping with the beehives, fetching water, assisting with milking and dairy operations, and maintaining the kitchen gardens.⁷⁷ There is also the possibility that the Carvers hired out Mary to other nearby farms for short periods. Chas. [Charles] Baker, the son of former slave Jane Baker, recollected that his mother told him the worst part of slavery was when slaves were “farmed out,” that is, when an owner would loan or sublet slaves for “so many months at so much money,” and the man who

⁶⁹ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 200.

⁷⁰ G. W. Carver to Dr. L. C. Fischer, September 14, 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0021, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁷¹ 1860 U.S. Census, Slave Schedule, District 63, Buffalo Township, Newton, Missouri, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

⁷² “Moses Carver,” 1860 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 95, dwelling 628, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com; see also Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 15. It is unclear when Jackson Carroll first arrived on the Moses Carver farm. We also do not know how long he stayed as a laborer or when he finally departed.

⁷³ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Moses Carver,” 1860 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 95, dwelling 628, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com; see also Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 15.

⁷⁶ “Interview with Betty Brown,” in *Missouri Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavers in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 52.

⁷⁷ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 135-38.

rented the slaves would treat them “like animals.”⁷⁸ Of course, whether Mary encountered this situation during her time on the Moses Carver farm is not known.

The living quarters utilized by Mary, and eventually her two sons, was most likely a hewn-logged slave cabin. Although Mary may have initially resided with Moses and Susan in their log cabin, which was constructed shortly after the arrival of the Carvers in the late 1830s, it is more likely that another slave cabin was offered to the enslaved woman and her children.⁷⁹ George W. Carver stated on several occasions that he lived “in a little one-roomed log shanty” on the Carver farm.⁸⁰ There was some evidence that the Carvers may have modified one of their existing log structures for use as the slave cabin. For example, George W. Carver remembered working to remove rocks “from the outside chimney corner of . . . [the] old log house, with the injunction to throw them down hill.”⁸¹ Other buildings may also have been salvaged or reclaimed for new purposes. Moses and Susan Carver may have used the arrival of Mary as an occasion to construct a new, and perhaps larger, log cabin for themselves, thereby freeing their former residence for use as a slave cabin.⁸² In either case, the slave cabin would have been located near the main house, and a network of footpaths would have connected the building to other nearby farms.⁸³ Oral testimony provided by Moses Carver’s nephew Tom Williams during the early 1940s, which eventually made its way into the files of the National Park Service, described a slave cabin that

[F]aced east with a single window in the west and a chimney on the north. It was built of hewn oak logs perhaps six inches through, notched at the ends and fitted together, the cracks then being filled with clay or clinking. The door was a plank door with wooden hinges. . . . The roof was of clapboards. The chimney was built of rock up to the mantelpiece and of sticks and clay from there. The sticks were about two and one half inches in diameter.⁸⁴

Another informant, James Robinson, an old-timer who lived in Diamond, Missouri, noted that the slave cabin had no foundation and that the fireplace just sat “on top of the ground.”⁸⁵ Whether this oral testimony was accurate, or even reliable, is unclear. What it does provide, however, is a rough representation of what slave quarters may have been like on the Carver farm. A formal archeological investigation conducted by the National Park Service in April and May

⁷⁸ “Jane Baker – Ex-Slave,” in *Missouri Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavers in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 24.

⁷⁹ See, for example, Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 72, 154.

⁸⁰ Carver, “A Brief Sketch”; see also Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0015, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

⁸² Paul L. Beaubien and Merrill J. Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument: The Archeological Search for George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” *Negro History Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (November 1954): 35; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 8-9.

⁸³ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 154, and Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 60, 151.

⁸⁴ Beaubien and Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument,” 35.

⁸⁵ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 34.

1953 to determine the exact location of the slave cabin within the national monument proved inconclusive, although “cultural material of the proper age, a few lumps of chinking and two small areas of burned earth which may have some connection with fireplace hearths” were discovered.⁸⁶ Additional archeological investigations conducted during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as geophysical and geochemical prospection studies conducted during the 1990s, have confirmed the locations of “the original dwellings built by Moses Carver.”⁸⁷

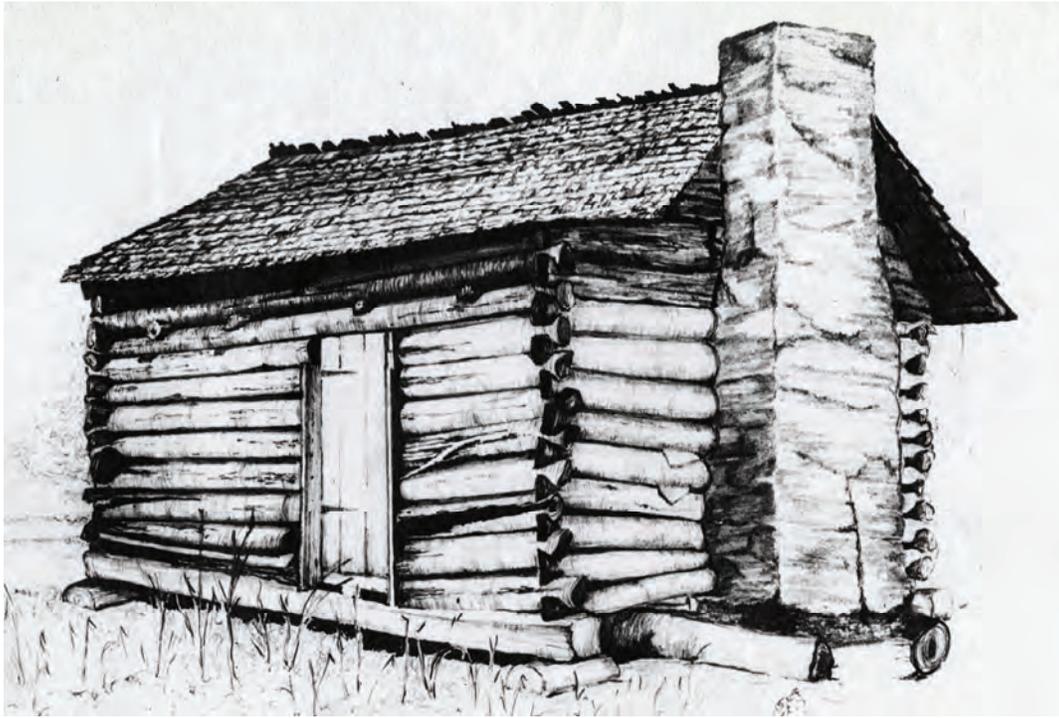


Figure 7. Sketch of Carver slave cabin prepared for Henry Ford, circa 1937. *From the collections of The Henry Ford.*

Interestingly, the best description of the Carver slave cabin can be found in the private papers of Henry Ford. The automobile manufacturer, who was an acquaintance of George W. Carver during the late 1930s, became obsessed with recreating the Carver slave cabin at Greenfield Village, his outdoor history museum and estate in Dearborn, Michigan. As a result, Ford and his staff were among the first people to initiate research on the history of the slave cabin.⁸⁸ This comprehensive effort, which was led by Frank Campsall, an assistant in Ford’s administrative offices, began in October 1937 and continued through the early 1940s. Campsall corresponded with C. M. Shartel, the existing owners of the Carver farm, and also sent inquiries to George W. Carver requesting information on the appearance and general description of the

⁸⁶ Beaubien and Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument,” 33, 36-37.

⁸⁷ Ervan G. Garrison, “Archaeogeophysical and Geochemical Studies at George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” *Historical Archaeology* 30, no. 2 (1996): 37.

⁸⁸ C. M. Shartel to Mr. A. W. Curtis, Jr., undated, George Washington Carver Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

structure.⁸⁹ Shortly thereafter, Carver prepared drawings showing two views of the slave cabin and also transmitted reminiscences about the building:

The chimney was made of clay and sticks.
The openings between the logs were filled with clay.

The dimensions of log cabin were 14' x 18'; height of wall 9'; height of wall plus distance to ridge of roof 14'.

The furnishings of the interior [*sic*] were:

1. Wooden bench
2. Split bottom chair
3. Corded bed
4. Feather tick⁹⁰



Figure 8. Carver with Edsel, left, and Henry Ford, right, in front of the reconstructed slave cabin at Greenfield Village, July 22, 1942.

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In a follow-up letter by Campsall to Austin W. Curtis Jr., Carver's assistant, on October 14, 1937, Campsall expressed gratitude for the information and noted that "Mr. Ford . . . [was] very much pleased."⁹¹ Indeed, Carver's detailed recollections were later utilized by Ford and his staff to construct the George Washington Carver Birthplace Building at Greenfield Village in 1942.⁹²

Missouri and the Civil War

On May 30, 1854, seven years before the first bullet was fired in the Civil War, President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law.

The legislation granted new states the right to vote on the issue of slavery and invalidated the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had banned slavery in the northern portion of the

⁸⁹ A. W. Curtis, Jr., to Mr. Henry Ford, October 8, 1937, George Washington Carver Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Frank Campsall to A. W. Curtis, Jr., October 14, 1937, George Washington Carver Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁹² "Departmental Communication," May 14, 1942, George Washington Carver Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Louisiana Territory with the exception of Missouri.⁹³ Both Kansas and Nebraska became territories and officially opened for settlement, the first settlers mainly consisting of Missourians seeking land and greater prosperity in Kansas.⁹⁴ By February 1855, the number of white settlers living in the Kansas Territory had increased from eight hundred to over eight thousand people, 50 percent of whom were from Missouri, about 33 percent from the Midwest and mid-Atlantic states, 10 percent from New England and other areas, and 7 percent from Southern states. A multitude of diverging opinions on slavery circulated throughout the state—from proslavery to neutral to free state to abolitionist.⁹⁵ Since the status of Kansas as a slave or free state depended on a referendum, Northerners moved into Kansas or provided aid to free-state proponents, and Southerners crossed the border to vote in the election.⁹⁶ At the same time, outside organizations, such as the New England Emigrant Aid Company, which had formed in the summer of 1854 to promote free-soil settlement in Kansas, further fueled internal division by providing aid in the form of money and weapons to local farmers.⁹⁷ By January 1856, Kansas had two territorial governments: an official, proslavery one at Lecompton and an unofficial, free-soil one at Topeka, although the latter represented the majority of actual residents.⁹⁸ On February 2, 1858, President James Buchanan sided with Southern Democrats and recommended the admission of Kansas as a slave state into the Union. Approximately six months later, however, residents of the Kansas Territory rejected the Lecompton Constitution, resolving instead to remain in territorial status. Kansas ultimately became the thirty-fourth state to join the Union on January 29, 1861, when it was admitted as a free state under the Wyandotte Constitution.⁹⁹

As tensions increased in the late 1850s and early 1860s, Missouri and Kansas became entangled in a violent struggle over slavery. Kansas jayhawkers, anti-slavery advocates turned raiders against “border ruffians,” and proslavery bushwhackers, or marauding bands of irregular guerrillas, conducted raids in Missouri and Kansas, respectively.¹⁰⁰ This violence, known as Bleeding Kansas, continued and intensified during the Civil War.¹⁰¹ Militant confrontations began as early as May 1856, when a proslavery mob pillaged Lawrence, Kansas. Abolitionist John Brown and a small group of men responded to this attack by murdering five proslavery settlers north of Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas.¹⁰² Jayhawkers led by “practical abolitionists” James Montgomery and Charles R. Jennison, and U.S. Senator James H. Lane, wanted to end slavery by armed force and introduced slave-liberating raids into Missouri. Montgomery went on his first raid with Brown in 1858 and, along with Jennison and Lane, continued liberating

⁹³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 7-8; Jeff R. Bremer, “A Species of Town-Building Madness: Quindaro and Kansas Territory, 1856-1862,” in *Kansas History* 26, no. 3 (2003): 158; Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 264; McCandless, *A History of Missouri Volume II*, 5; and Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 12.

⁹⁴ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 28-29, and Bremer, “Quindaro and Kansas Territory,” 156-58.

⁹⁵ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 28-35, 43.

⁹⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 7-8.

⁹⁷ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 145-69; see also Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 35-40.

⁹⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 148.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-69.

¹⁰⁰ Leo E. Huff, “Guerrillas, Jayhawkers and Bushwhackers in Northern Arkansas During the Civil War,” *OzarksWatch* 4, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 52.

¹⁰¹ Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 1, 219-45, and Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 3.

¹⁰² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 10; Richard B. Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri to Freedom in Kansas,” *Kansas History*, Spring 1989, 30; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 95-96; and Bremer, “Quindaro and Kansas Territory,” 158.

slaves from Missouri and terrorizing slaveholders into the early 1860s.¹⁰³ Aid to Kansas settlers from northern financiers, border ruffians voting in the Kansas election, slave-liberating raids by abolitionists from Kansas, and raids by proslavery bushwhackers all fueled the tension, anger, and resentment between the two states.¹⁰⁴

With free-soil Kansas to the west, Confederate Arkansas to the south, neutral Kentucky to the east, and Unionist Iowa and Illinois to the north and northeast, Missouri as a border state was a dangerous mix of divided loyalties and conflicting allegiances. Although the majority of Missourians supported the Union, this support was both calculated and tentative and was mainly provided in an effort to maintain the status quo.¹⁰⁵ Slaveholding Missourians understood that secession would most likely lead to the loss of their enslaved property as Union troops were turned loose on their state. Missouri's divisions were also reflected in the state's politics. Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson and his administration were Southern sympathizers and established a secessionist government in Jackson City, Missouri. The Missouri state convention elected to consider secession, however, decided in February 1861 to remain in the Union. It reconvened in July and "voted to depose the secessionist government and install a provisional government headed by Hamilton R. Gamble." By the end of the summer, Union troops had forced the secessionists in government to flee to the southwest corner of the state. There, on November 3, 1861, Jackson and a pro-Southern legislature met at Neosho, in Newton County, and "enacted an ordinance of secession" as government-in-exile.¹⁰⁶ But by the spring of 1862, federal troops had forced both the secessionist government and Confederate troops out of Missouri.¹⁰⁷ Fighting continued, however, as Southern and Northern guerrilla groups launched raids directed at enemy soldiers and civilians. The Carver farm, located in a divided Newton County, just one county north of Confederate Arkansas and bordering Kansas, was very much guerrilla territory during the Civil War, which was fought between April 1861 and April 1865. One historian, for example, estimated that over twenty-five military engagements took place in Newton County during the conflict.¹⁰⁸ Missourians, however, were most frightened by arbitrary and indiscriminate violence that accompanied the conflict and often involved the theft of property. Both large and small farmers became a collective target as both sides, Union and Confederate, sought to obtain weapons, provisions, crops, and livestock.¹⁰⁹

The Abduction of Mary and George

The story of the abduction of Mary and George has both intrigue and drama.¹¹⁰ In circa 1865, shortly before the Civil War drew to a close, Mary and her second son, George, were taken

¹⁰³ Albert Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 42-64; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 95-96; and Sheridan, "From Slavery in Missouri," 30-31.

¹⁰⁴ Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 42-44.

¹⁰⁵ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 270-71.

¹⁰⁶ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 290-94; Silvana R. Siddali, ed., *Missouri's War: The Civil War in Documents* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 226; *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1888), 58-62; Parrish, *A History of Missouri. Volume III*, 22-31; Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas*, 224-25; and Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 270-72.

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 272; Siddali, *Missouri's War*, 87-88.

¹⁰⁸ Mark W. Geiger, *Financial Fraud and Guerrilla Violence in Missouri's Civil War, 1861-1865* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 107.

¹⁰⁹ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 273-75, and Siddali, *Missouri's War*, 121-25.

¹¹⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 10.

from the Moses Carver farm. George was an infant and Mary was thought to be about twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Moses and Susan Carver, as well as Mary's oldest son, James, survived the incident by hiding from the raiders—possibly in a brush pile.¹¹¹ Following the incident, Moses sent a man named John Bentley to recover his property with the promise that if he was successful, he would receive forty acres of timberland and a racehorse. Bentley was able to locate George in Arkansas, apparently abandoned by the raiders after becoming ill with whooping cough, but Mary had vanished. Bentley ultimately accepted the racehorse as payment for his efforts but refused to accept the land because he was unable to locate Mary.¹¹²

The truth, of course, is more difficult to ascertain. There was no doubt that throughout the Civil War, pro-Confederate and pro-Union guerrillas raided Missouri farms and attacked enemy soldiers and civilians, particularly along the Kansas-Missouri and Arkansas-Missouri borders adjacent to Newton County. Moses Carver, a prosperous farmer with significant land holdings, would have been a popular target for these groups and others with intent to do harm. The Carver farm had apparently been besieged at least once, or possibly twice, previously by raiders looking for money hidden on the property.¹¹³ That said, the real question is what happened to Mary. Moses and Susan Carver's slave, who had cost seven hundred dollars and who had lived on the farm for nearly a decade, disappeared during a period that coincided with emancipation. Diane Mutti Burke noted that “[a]s the war progressed, many of Missouri's nearly 115,000 slaves took advantage of the chaos and struck a blow for their own freedom.”¹¹⁴

Although most versions of the abduction story indicate that Mary was sold in Arkansas, there are also several conflicting accounts. Elza Winter believed that Mary died of pneumonia shortly after her seizure.¹¹⁵ Mamie E. Lee Shripe, who befriended George W. Carver while he was a student at Iowa Agricultural College, argued that Mary and George may have tried to escape from the Carver farm. Writing in February 1949, she noted, “Then a war for slaves came and George and his mother tried to get away. George had whooping cough very bad, and he and his mother were separated.”¹¹⁶ Another rumor held that Bentley found Mary, lied to Moses, and sold her at a profit for himself.¹¹⁷ In his own biographical account, prepared in 1897, George W. Carver indicated that a sister had also been abducted. He noted that “there are now so many conflicting reports concerning them I dare not say if they are dead or alive,” adding that “some

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹¹² Hersey, *An Environmental Biography*, 11.

¹¹³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 11, and Hersey, *An Environmental Biography*, 10; see also “Interview with Elza Winter Sr., in front of Superintendent's Office,” G.W. Carver Contemporaries, November 15, 1953, GWCNM Library, and Lucy Cherry Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, Folder 154.16.f, Box 16, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, Collection No. 154, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC. It is important to note that the abduction episode is based on oral testimony that George W. Carver learned as a child. Although later interviews conducted by the National Park Service and Tuskegee Institute support the general outline of the story, there is no documentary evidence to confirm that any of the events actually occurred.

¹¹⁴ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 270.

¹¹⁵ “Interview with Elza Winter Sr., in front of Superintendent's Office,” G.W. Carver Contemporaries, November 15, 1953, GWCNM Library.

¹¹⁶ Mrs. Mamie E. Lee Shripe, “Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver,” February 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0624-0626, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁷ Crisp, *George Washington Carver*.

say they saw them afterwards going north with the soldiers.”¹¹⁸ Regardless, George W. Carver had no recollections of his biological mother. Whether she was abducted or possibly took advantage of a fluid situation to flee her enslavement is not known. In 1937, at the approximate age of seventy-three, Carver wrote that “what little I can learn about my mother is that she was a very remarkable woman from many angles.”¹¹⁹

Interestingly, the involvement of John Bentley raises more questions than answers. Bentley’s muster roll and other service records indicated that he enlisted in the 14th Missouri State Militia Cavalry with the rank of private in March 1862.¹²⁰ Bentley was described as thirty-nine years old, five feet four inches in height, with a dark complexion, dark eyes, and dark hair. His birthplace was listed as Leicester, England, and his occupation was a carpenter.¹²¹ Bentley served as a battalion spy (or scout).¹²² On January 28, 1865, however, Bentley was taken prisoner in Neosho, Missouri, and charged with murder. He was released by order of Brigadier General John B. Sanborn on March 8, 1865.¹²³ Bentley mustered out of service approximately one month later.¹²⁴ Of course, the fact that Bentley was charged with murder may have no connection to the abduction of Mary and George, but it does raise the possibility that the truth—whatever it may be—was neither heroic nor valiant.



Figure 9. Drawing of John Bentley, undated.
George Washington Carver National Monument.

¹¹⁸ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver.”

¹¹⁹ G. W. Carver to Dr. L. C. Fischer, September 14, 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0021, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁰ Missouri Soldiers’ Records, Office of Adjutant General, Record of Service Card, Civil War, 1861-1865, and Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Missouri, Roll 745, Miscellaneous Card Abstracts Eighth Cavalry, N-Z and Eighth State Militia, Cavalry A-G, NARA-DC.

¹²¹ Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Missouri, Roll 745, Miscellaneous Card Abstracts Eighth Cavalry, N-Z, and Eighth State Militia, Cavalry A-G, NARA-DC.

¹²² Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Missouri, Roll 280, Fourteenth State Militia, Cavalry, A-G, NARA-DC.

¹²³ Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Missouri, Roll 745, Miscellaneous Card Abstracts Eighth Cavalry, N-Z and Eighth State Militia, Cavalry A-G, NARA-DC.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in rebellious states.¹²⁵ Because Missouri was not a rebellious state, slavery remained in place until slaves were officially emancipated by the state constitutional convention on January 11, 1865.¹²⁶ Former slave owners reacted differently to emancipation. Some farmers immediately turned their backs on their former property and “drove . . . [them] off of their land.”¹²⁷ Other former slave owners remained silent and did not tell their enslaved workers that they were free. Still others coerced their former slaves to stay as wage laborers.¹²⁸ In the years ahead, James and George would remain on the farm in the custody of Moses and Susan Carver. Whether they were told they were free is not known. With little education, and at such a young and vulnerable age, their options were few. One lesson was clear, however—George W. Carver had witnessed the horror of slavery. The peculiar institution, and the subsequent carnage and cruelty that the nation’s Civil War wrought, had left Carver and his brother orphaned. Writing on February 28, 1905, George W. Carver noted, “Slavery was a hard and terrible school but I am sure it had something good about it despite the fact that many a heart was broken, and many sank into eternal rest to open their eyes into another world and reap their reward, whatever that was.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Sheridan, “From Slavery in Missouri,” 31, and Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 282.

¹²⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 9-10; Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 299; “Missouri Free,” *Daily Missouri Democrat*, January 12, 1865, in Siddali, *Missouri’s War*, 226; and *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties*, 136-39.

¹²⁷ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 301-2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 301-3.

¹²⁹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 152.

Chapter Three

LIFE AND WORK ON THE MOSES CARVER FARM

George W. Carver, although a sickly and—by his own words—frail child, lived and worked on the Moses Carver farm throughout his early childhood.¹ His labor provided an important contribution to the farm and appears to have been much appreciated by his former slaveholders. Carver learned to read and acquired important domestic and household skills, including cooking, sewing, weaving, and ironing, that would allow him to survive, and later thrive, during a twenty-year odyssey in search of formal schooling. Little is known about the relationships between George Carver, his brother James, Moses and Susan Carver, and the other laborers who worked and lived on the farm. Although Carver's life on the homestead was difficult, it may not have been completely grim. Indeed, it was on the Moses Carver farm that Carver developed a deep intellectual curiosity and a lifelong interest in nature and the environment. The farm was also the setting for Carver's spiritual awakening, which would later become one of his most defining character traits.

A Frail and Sickly Child

George W. Carver, who was named on the 1870 federal census as “Carver, George,” spent approximately eleven years living and working on the Moses Carver farm, from circa 1865 through 1876.² In later years, Carver seemed unsure about how long he resided on the farm. In 1897, for example, he wrote that he departed at age nine.³ Two decades later, circa 1922, Carver stated that he left the farm at age ten.⁴ Some biographers, notably Linda O. McMurry, have noted that Carver may have stayed on the farm until age twelve.⁵ Whatever the case, the significant point is that Carver and his older brother, James, remained on the farm in the custody or care of Moses and Susan Carver after emancipation. Officially, slavery and involuntary servitude, except as government administered for the punishment of a crime, were abolished in Missouri on January 11, 1865, when the state legislature passed an Emancipation Ordinance.⁶

As noted previously, former slave owners in Missouri reacted differently to the release of their slaves. In this specific case, Moses and Susan Carver allowed the two orphaned boys,

¹ G. W. Carver to T. H. Alexander, ca. 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0670, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

² “Moses Carver,” 1870 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 24, dwelling 169, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-DC), accessed through Ancestry.com.

³ George Washington Carver, “A Brief Sketch of My Life,” ca. 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0011, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd,” Reel 1, Frame 0007, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵ See Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 19.

⁶ “Missouri Free,” *Daily Missouri Democrat*, January 12, 1865, in Silvana R. Siddali, ed., *Missouri's War: The Civil War in Documents* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 226.

James, perhaps six, and George, likely just a few months old, to stay on the farm after emancipation. Moses and Susan, who were fifty-two and fifty, respectively, may have recalled the important role they played as surrogate parents to their orphaned nephews and niece after the death of George Carver in 1839. They may have also looked with disfavor at the prospect of life on the farm without the assistance of James. For his part, James may have understood that with limited resources he would not be able to care for his infant brother.⁷ The outline of the arrangement could have been quite simple: shelter, food, clothing, and other basic necessities in exchange for initially James's and then both their labor. It is important to note, however, that there is no evidence to indicate that James and George were forced or coerced to stay on the Moses Carver farm after January 11, 1865.

One factor that may have caused James to stay with Moses and Susan Carver was the poor health of his infant brother. Writing about his childhood in 1897, George W. Carver described a youth plagued by sickness and illness: "My body was very feeble and it was a constant warfare between life and death to see who would gain the mastery."⁸ Carver suffered recurring infections of pertussis (whooping cough), a respiratory illness caused by a bacterial infection, and croup, a swelling of the vocal cords that was probably caused by diphtheria bacteria.⁹ Both diseases proved fatal to children during the nineteenth century. In 1850 in Mississippi, for example, pertussis and diphtheria contributed to 2.8 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively, of all deaths in the state.¹⁰ Carver also suffered from aphonia (voice loss), or, as he described it, a weak throat, throughout his childhood and into old age. Writing in 1926, Carver noted, "I have to be exceedingly careful with my throat. I have a very, very weak throat, and it gives away on me if I am not very careful."¹¹ McMurry suggested that Carver's aphonia may have been caused by a pneumococcal, or perhaps tubercular, infection.¹² Both illnesses can damage or scar vocal cords and result in a high-pitched voice—which Carver was reputed to have had. Carver also suffered, in later years, from pernicious anemia, a vitamin B12 deficiency.¹³ There is, however, no indication that this disorder affected Carver as a child on the Moses Carver farm. Carver's multiple health problems may have been linked to the sudden termination of his breast-feeding as an infant. Carver would have been breast-fed by his biological mother, Mary, before their abduction and ultimate separation. Although it was not known at the time, breast-feeding offers numerous health benefits to infants, including reduced risks of lower respiratory infections, gastrointestinal infections, acute ear infections, and asthma.¹⁴ During the nineteenth century, women typically breast-fed their babies for eighteen months, and sometimes longer, if they were trying to delay conception.¹⁵ Carver's later

⁷ Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 300.

⁸ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897."

⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 13-14.

¹⁰ K. David Patterson, "Disease Environments of the Antebellum South," in Ronald L. Numbers and Todd L. Savitt, eds., *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 154.

¹¹ G. W. Carver to Forrest D. Brown, November 1, 1926, Reel 10, Frame 0232, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 13-14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 291.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2011), 1-2.

¹⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 52.

susceptibility to respiratory infections, including pertussis, may have been caused by the cessation of breast-feeding and its substitute by an alternative, low-nutrient diet.

Living Arrangements for James and George

After emancipation, James and George may have remained in the former slave quarters that they had occupied with their biological mother, although several scholars, including McMurry and Anna Coxe Toogood, have argued that the two young boys moved to the “main cabin.”¹⁶ In 1870, when James and George were approximately eleven and five, respectively, they resided within the same dwelling-house as Moses and Susan Carver.¹⁷ Interestingly, the main residence was also home to two other people—Nickles Holt Sr. and Nickles Holt Jr.¹⁸ The elder Holt, who was eighty-eight, was a white farmer who had been born in Tennessee. His son, or perhaps grandson, was fourteen and had attended school within the last year. The exact role the Holts played on the farm is not known. They may have been seasonal workers brought on to assist with the upcoming harvest or perhaps sharecroppers who leased land from Moses and Susan Carver or another nearby farmer. It is unclear how long the Holts resided with Moses and Susan Carver or the specifics of the living arrangements.

What is known, however, is that Moses and Susan Carver defined themselves as a separate family unit independent of James and George and the Holts. The 1870 federal census, which was enumerated by W. T. Eckles on August 27, 1870, indicated that Moses and Susan Carver and James, George, and the Holts were two discrete family units.¹⁹ Moses and Susan lived in dwelling-house 169 and were family 172. James, George, and the Holts lived in dwelling-house 169 and were family 173.²⁰ Although some Carver biographers have maintained that Moses and Susan adopted James and George after the disappearance of Mary, federal census data from 1870 do not support this claim.²¹ Unlike the orphaned children of Moses Carver’s half-brother, George, who lived under the same roof as Moses and Susan Carver in the 1840s, Moses and Susan Carver and James and George did not evolve into a single family unit, or, in the view of Eckles, meet the Census Office’s classification of a family, that is, “one or more

¹⁶ Anna Coxe Toogood, “Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 30; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 13.

¹⁷ “Moses Carver,” 1870 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 24, dwelling 169, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com; see also Charles W. Porter III, “Report on an Investigation of George Washington Carver’s Birthplace at the Old ‘Diamond Grove’ Plantation Near Diamond, Newton County, Missouri,” February 24-March 5, 1943, 13, Boxes 187-188, George Washington Carver National Monument, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

¹⁸ “Moses Carver,” 1870 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 24, dwelling 169, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com; see also Charles W. Porter III, “Report on an Investigation of George Washington Carver’s Birthplace at the Old ‘Diamond Grove’ Plantation Near Diamond, Newton County, Missouri,” February 24-March 5, 1943, 13, Boxes 187-188, George Washington Carver National Monument, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

¹⁹ “Moses Carver,” 1870 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 24, dwelling 169, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Linda O. McMurry and Mark D. Hersey, among others, implied that James and George were adopted by Moses and Susan Carver. See, for example, Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 11, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 13.

persons living together and provided for in common.”²² Although Moses and Susan may have been happy that James and George remained on the farm, their living arrangements, as well as the presence of other boarders, suggest a more nuanced relationship.

As might be expected, the relationship that developed between James and George and Moses and Susan Carver is difficult to characterize. Certainly, Moses and Susan Carver believed they had some responsibility to the orphaned boys as represented by the fact that they allowed the children to remain on the farm after the abduction of their mother. That said, there is no evidence that Moses or Susan Carver adopted the children or became their legal guardians. Prior scholars argued that Moses and Susan assumed the role of surrogate grandparents to the young boys.²³ Unfortunately, this is very difficult to judge from the extant historical record and may be more wishful thinking on the part of biographers than an accurate depiction of the relationship. To be sure, in later years, George W. Carver voiced neither complaint nor criticism about the care he received at the hands of the Carvers. Writing in 1897, two decades after leaving the farm, he noted that “Mr. and Mrs. Carver were very kind to me and I thank them so much for my home training. They encouraged me to secure knowledge, helping me all they could, but this was quite limited.”²⁴ At the same time, however, George W. Carver spoke of a childhood that, despite a bucolic location, was both painful and heavyhearted: “My brother James and I grew up together, sharing each other’s sorrows on the splendid farm owned by Mr. Carver.”²⁵

Some scant evidence suggests that Moses and Susan Carver may have continued to treat George as an enslaved servant. Lawrence Elliott, who published a popular biography of George W. Carver in the late 1960s, noted that he was referred to as “Carver’s George” by Moses Carver—a derogatory usage that was popular before emancipation to imply possession and ownership of slaves.²⁶ Unfortunately, the book lacks attribution, making it difficult to determine the veracity of the claim. It is known that George W. Carver referred to Moses Carver as “Mr. Carver” and continued to do so throughout his life, but this was probably more a function of racial norms than parenting.²⁷ O. T. Stephenson, a childhood neighbor of the Carvers who moved to Diamond in 1869 when he was seventeen years old, painted a more positive picture of the relationship. Stephenson recalled that Moses Carver “was never so happy as when playing his fiddle for those boys.”²⁸ Interestingly, Gary R. Kremer, another biographer, suggested that two studio portraits of James and George taken as youngsters, believed to have been commissioned by Moses and Susan Carver, “suggests paternal pride that transcended any purely economic relationship.”²⁹ Although this could be true, the exact circumstances

²² “Instructions to Assistant Marshals,” Census Office, Ninth Census, United States, 1870, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

²³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 13-15, 19, and Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 6-8.

²⁴ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver.”

²⁵ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

²⁶ See Lawrence Elliott, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 28-33.

²⁷ G. W. Carver to M. L. Ross, February 26, 1941, Reel 36, Frame 0670, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁸ O. T. Stephenson to James Saxon Childers, September 29, 1932, Folder 1931, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

²⁹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 6.

surrounding the creation of the photographs are not known, and in any case the photographs represent just one brief moment in the decade that the two boys lived and worked on the farm.

It should also be noted that there is no documented proof that the boys ever suffered corporal punishment at the hands of either Moses or Susan Carver, and the physical discipline that is alleged in biographies by Raleigh H. Merritt, Ethel Edwards, and Linda O. McMurry is not particularly traumatic but rather something that any errant child, either white or black, may have experienced in the 1870s.³⁰ Finally, George W. Carver sought out Moses Carver as an adult and, on at least one occasion, returned to the farm to visit “the old house [and] to see Mr. Carver.”³¹ Once again, however, the purpose of the trip is not definitive, and another reason, such as visiting his older brother, may have been the primary purpose of the reunion.

Work and Chores on the Farm

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Carver homestead continued to be a prosperous and thriving farm. In 1870, for example, the Carvers planted and harvested Indian corn (five hundred bushels) and Irish potatoes (fifteen bushels) and also produced one hundred pounds of wool and twenty gallons of sugar molasses.³² In the following years, the Carvers cultivated other crops including oats (one hundred bushels) and rye (forty bushels).³³ Moses and Susan Carver also continued to maintain a substantial number of livestock, including horses (ten total), milch cows (three total), sheep (thirty-eight total), swine (fifteen total), and other cattle (seven total), which were valued at seven hundred dollars.³⁴ The farm also had a large walnut and apple orchard that was valued at five hundred dollars. In 1870, the total value of the Carver farm was believed to be five thousand dollars, and Moses and Susan’s personal estate was estimated at seven hundred dollars.³⁵

Like most Missouri farms during this period, their success was based on manual labor exemplified by long days of working in the fields and tending to livestock. James and George, as farm laborers, would have been responsible for an array of duties and chores, which, as they got older, would increase in difficulty. Although several biographers, including McMurry and Mark D. Hersey, argued that George W. Carver’s frailty limited his responsibilities to the domestic sphere, that is, cooking, sewing, weaving, and ironing, in actuality he appeared to have been given minor physical tasks including carrying water, preparing logs, and shelling corn.³⁶ In

³⁰ See, for example, episodes noted in Raleigh H. Merritt, *From Captivity to Fame: Or the Life of George Washington Carver* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1938), 27-28; Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (Cincinnati: Psyche Press, 1976), 6-7; and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 15-16. See also Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 80, 213.

³¹ “The Foregoing Is a List of Written Questions Made Up by Raleigh H. Merritt, The Answers to Which Were Made by Dr. George W. Carver in His Own Hand Writing,” July 1927, Reel 1, Frame 0022, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³² Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “Moses Carver,” 1870 U.S. Census, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 24, dwelling 169, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

³⁶ See, for example, G. W. Carver to Allen Eaton, January 16, 1940, Reel 32, Frame 0637, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress,

April 1940, for example, George W. Carver wrote about the preparation of logs on the farm, which probably involved splitting and bark peeling: “This picture of you preparing the log is so characteristic of the way we used to do it.”³⁷ In March 1942, Carver told the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* that “as a little boy . . . [he] carr[ie]d gallons of water from . . . [the] spring for more than an hour to start the ash hopper running during the spring season to make the usual quantity of soap we needed for the year.”³⁸ Carver was also, to be sure, quick to describe his many limitations as a farmhand. In July 1927, he wrote that “I do not remember much about my childhood days than that I was very, very frail sick most of the time. To carry a little water from the spring in a gallon pail. Bring in a few chips and keep the fire going was about all I would do.”³⁹ In contrast, James, who had no known physical ailments, was tasked with more strenuous activities on the farm. He participated in neighborhood work swaps and assisted with the difficult job of threshing wheat.⁴⁰

Within the domestic sphere, George took on a multitude of household tasks that were required to keep the farm operating, including cooking, cleaning, laundering, sewing, crocheting, and ironing.⁴¹ Carver appeared to have learned these and other domestic skills from Susan Carver, who in 1870 was approximately fifty-six years old.⁴² George may have also helped Susan tend the garden, feed and water livestock, and run errands to nearby farms. Laundry and washing duties, which were both daily and weekly activities, seemed to have taken the largest chunk of George’s time.⁴³ In later years, for example, relatives of Moses and Susan claimed that the young George spent “many happy days of his childhood” helping with the family wash in the Carver spring.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Carver would later utilize his domestic skills after he left the farm. During his migration in search of a formal education and his enrollment in college, Carver earned a living by taking in laundry and ironing and working as a domestic laborer. Carver also appeared to have enjoyed sewing and crocheting, as he continued both activities into his later life.

and G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁷ G. W. Carver to Allen Eaton, January 16, 1940, Reel 32, Frame 0637, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁸ The quote is cited in John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen, “Springs of Genius: An Integrated Management Plan for George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” February 1999, 21, prepared for the National Park Service, Midwest Region, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

³⁹ “The Foregoing Is a List of Written Questions Made Up by Raleigh H. Merritt, The Answers to Which Were Made by Dr. George W. Carver in His Own Hand Writing,” July 1927, Reel 1, Frame 0022, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰ Jessie Guzman, “Interview with John F. Harris,” G.W. Carver Contemporaries, May 28, 1958, George Washington Carver National Monument Library, Diamond, Missouri (hereafter GWCNM Library). John F. Harris, a retired piano tuner who knew George W. Carver as a young boy, argued that Jim was assigned the more demanding tasks on the farm. For example, on May 25, 1948, Harris stated that he “[k]new Carver’s brother, Jim. Saw more of him. Jim was husky, George was weak. Moses Carver pampered George and was good to him. George had no hard work to do, but Jim did.” See Oral History of John Harris, Conducted by Tuskegee Institute Research Team, 1948, GWCNM Library.

⁴¹ McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 19-20.

⁴² Linda O. McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 14-15.

⁴³ On the difficulty of washing, see Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 135.

⁴⁴ The episode is reported in Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 5.

Scholars and biographers also speculated on the relationship that developed between Susan Carver and George. McMurry argued, for example, that George's poor health "placed him more directly under the influence of Susan, who apparently became his most significant role model."⁴⁵ For his part, George W. Carver included in his papers, which contained many reminiscences of his childhood, only a few fragmentary snippets about Susan Carver, implying that she was not a major role model—and certainly not a surrogate mother as has been claimed. Other women with whom George Carver would later interact, particularly Mariah Watkins, Lucy Seymour, and Clara C. Duncan, who were African American, seemed to have filled this role. That said, there is evidence that Susan tended to George's many illnesses with care and compassion. George was later told, for example, that Susan treated his whooping cough with juice squeezed from a roasted red onion and sweetened with sugar or molasses.⁴⁶

It is also important to note that George W. Carver retained many positive recollections of his time on the Moses Carver farm. In later years, as a teacher and educator at Tuskegee Institute, Carver often received unsolicited letters and gifts from people that triggered memories of his youth. After receiving a jar of venison, for example, in February 1941, Carver noted:

It carried me back to my childhood days when venison was not a rarity by any means as very often old Mr. Carver would go out and kill a deer and a wild turkey or two before breakfast in the morning. That is, he would go out just as daylight was emerging from the horizon as both the deer and turkeys were very plentiful in Missouri where we lived.⁴⁷

On another occasion, after receiving a bolt of wool cloth, Carver reminisced to the sender about the production of homespun on the farm. Carver became quite emotional, writing, "Oh, how it brings to mind my boyhood days in Missouri where we raised our sheep, sheared them, scoured the wool, spun it, reeled it, and wove it onto cloth right in our own home on a handmade loom."⁴⁸ Other gifts triggered additional memories and recollections. Upon receiving a can of maple syrup from William John Ballou in May 1941, Carver wrote back that "when I was a boy on our Missouri farm we had a few maple trees and made some syrup every year, and it carried me back to my boyhood days to get this delicious syrup of yours."⁴⁹ It was, however, persimmon, a plumlike orange edible fruit, that brought back the best memories of Carver's days on the farm. In January 1940, Carver recalled the pure, unbridled enjoyment that he had as a child eating the wild fruit when a friend shared a story titled "Yule Log Greetings":

If you had just added wild persimmons along a little stream of spring water that never froze over during the winter, and

⁴⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 19-20.

⁴⁶ Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," November 26, 1957, 33, GWCNM Library; Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 136-37.

⁴⁷ G. W. Carver to M. L. Ross, February 26, 1941, Reel 36, Frame 0670, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ G. W. Carver to Allen Eaton, January 16, 1940, Reel 32, Frame 0637, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹ G. W. Carver to William John Ballou, May 14, 1941, Reel 37, Frame 0363, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

these persimmon trees along about Christmas time full of the most delicious persimmons that I have ever eaten. They seemed to me at that time better than any candy that we get today.⁵⁰

Of course, the reminiscence was important for another reason—it illustrated Carver’s early love of nature and an appreciation of the natural environment.



Figure 10. George Carver as a young boy in Missouri, circa 1876. *George Washington Carver National Monument.*

A Love of Nature and Intellectual Curiosity

George W. Carver developed a deep intellectual curiosity and a lifelong interest in nature during his years on the Moses Carver farm. This formative interaction with the natural landscape profoundly influenced and shaped his worldview and spurred an environmental awakening—and

⁵⁰ G. W. Carver to Allen Eaton, January 16, 1940, Reel 32, Frame 0637, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

possibly even a future career path.⁵¹ The 240-acre property, which consisted of cultivated fields, pastures, orchards, and woodlands, represented an idyllic setting for the young boy. The diverse natural habitat, which altered with the seasons and included an array of flora and fauna, became Carver's first laboratory. Writing in 1897, George W. Carver noted, "Day after day I spent in the woods alone in order to collect my floral beauties and put them in my little garden I had hidden in brush not far from the house."⁵² Although Carver needed to conceal his first garden from the peering eyes of Moses and Susan Carver because "it was considered foolishness in that neighborhood to waste time on flowers," his interest and love of nature was not diminished.⁵³ In circa 1922, Carver wrote that "I literally lived in the woods. I wanted to know every strange stone, flower, insect, bird, or beast."⁵⁴ Carver approached nature in decidedly spiritual terms. In September 1940, he wrote:

I remember as a boy a little expression that has lingered with me all through life. It said, "that flowers were the sweetest thing that God ever made and forgot to put a soul into it." It was one of the things that impressed me so very much that I always remembered it, but as I grow older and study plant life, I am convinced that God didn't forget to do anything that was worthwhile.⁵⁵

In later years, Carver was portrayed as having an almost superhuman ability to care for plants, a mythology that he himself linked to his time on the Moses Carver farm: "And strange to say all sorts of vegetation seemed to thrive under my touch until I was styled the plant doctor, and plants from all over the country would be brought to me for treatment."⁵⁶ Carver also became a collector of rocks and minerals. When tasked with removing baskets of rocks from the outside chimney of an old log house, an event that, once again, highlighted the fact that he undertook physical labor on the farm, Carver "obeyed but picked up the choicest ones and hid them in another place."⁵⁷ Carver also developed a deep love and appreciation of small animals. Lucy Cherry Crisp, a biographer who interviewed George W. Carver on several occasions in the 1930s, described the events that transpired after he accidentally killed a snowbird by throwing a rock at it in the barn.⁵⁸ Carver became grief-stricken and full of remorse for the small bird. Crisp reported that even in adulthood Carver would say, "I have never forgotten that poor little dead bird."⁵⁹

⁵¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 19.

⁵² "A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver."

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

⁵⁵ George W. Carver to Matther Woods, September 7, 1940, Reel 35, Frame 0066, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁶ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver"; see, for example, McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 16.

⁵⁷ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver."

⁵⁸ Lucy Cherry Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, Folder 154.16.f, Box 16, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, Collection No. 154, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Carver, like other children, also enjoyed other amusements and activities. In addition to roaming the woods, he crocheted and knitted and played games including “baseball, running, jumping, swimming, and checkers.”⁶⁰ During these activities, which would have certainly also involved his older brother, Carver also interacted with white children who lived on neighboring farms.⁶¹ In July 1931, for example, Carver recalled how a local white boy arrived one Saturday morning to play and talk.⁶² Carver may have also helped fashion crutches for a young white friend who was crippled.⁶³ It was, however, an innate intellectual curiosity that emerged as another defining characteristic of the young boy. Carver, by his own words, “thirsted for an education.”⁶⁴ Writing in 1897, he noted “from a child I had an inordinate desire for knowledge, and especially music, painting, flowers, and the sciences, Algebra being one of my favorite studies.”⁶⁵



Figure 11. George and James Carver, circa 1870s. *George Washington Carver National Monument.*

Carver’s desire to learn and his thirst for knowledge manifested itself in multiple ways. Lawrence Elliott noted, for example, that Carver painted pictures on whatever was available or at hand. He drew on the ground, he painted with berries on a flat rock, and he etched “on rock with a piece of tin.”⁶⁶ Most importantly, Carver learned to read and write. Corresponding with Louis Pammel, his former professor, in May 1922, Carver stated that his “education was picked up here and there. Mr. and Mrs. Carver taught me to read, spell, and write just a little.”⁶⁷ Interestingly, there was some evidence suggesting that Moses and Susan Carver may have been illiterate. Neither of the Carvers attended school in Sangamon County, Illinois, before migrating to Missouri, and the 1840 federal census listed Moses Carver as unable to “read or write.”⁶⁸ Charles W. Porter III, who worked for the National Park Service in the 1940s, reached

⁶⁰ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 15.

⁶⁴ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

⁶⁵ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

⁶⁶ Elliott, *Carver: The Man Who Overcame*, 19-20.

⁶⁷ George Washington Carver to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Folder Correspondence, Carver-Pammel (1918-1924), Box 1, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Ames, IA.

⁶⁸ “Moses Carver,” Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Marin, Newton County, Missouri, 257, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com. Interestingly, this was contradicted by later federal censuses.

a similar conclusion after reviewing deeds executed by Moses Carver and his second wife. Porter noted that the documents were not signed but rather executed with an “X” mark as was typical of those who were either illiterate or infirm.⁶⁹ In any case, George Carver’s reading ability was probably at least partly self-taught. Writing in circa 1922, Carver noted, “My only book was an old Webster’s Elementary Spelling book. . . . I almost knew the book by heart.”⁷⁰ Carver’s reliance on Noah Webster’s *Elementary Spelling Book*, which was originally published as *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* in 1783 and was popularly known as the blue-back speller, was not atypical. The elementary school speller, which was designed for structured or home schooling, allowed users to progress through a step-by-step process to obtain basic reading skills.⁷¹ According to Heather Andrea Williams, who studied African American literacy, “the speller accrued emotional significance as the guide that helped individuals to decipher written language.”⁷²

The Religious Conversion of George W. Carver

Another facet of George W. Carver’s life that blossomed on the Moses Carver farm was his spirituality. Carver’s religious conversion coincided with a broader spiritual awakening that occurred among recently freed African Americans in border states in the trans-Mississippi West. Organized religion played an important role in Missouri in the years before and after the Civil War. The church was a focal point of rural life and enabled farmers, who were often dispersed and isolated, to stay connected and engaged.⁷³ During the 1830s and 1840s, as settlement streamed across frontier Missouri, church services were often irregular and erratic activities led by circuit preachers and other itinerant ministers.⁷⁴ When church buildings were finally constructed, usually subsidized by settlers who pooled resources to establish a small parish, religious services became more formalized. Missouri was home to several Protestant denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian, although significant numbers of Roman Catholics also migrated into the state during the late 1870s and 1880s in search of work in urban areas.⁷⁵ Baptist and Methodist denominations initially opposed the institution of slavery. The Methodist church, for example, refused church membership to slaveholders through 1785.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, as church membership began to decline in the early 1800s, particularly among white males, the denominations reversed their position on the issue.⁷⁷ By the 1840s and 1850s, the issue of slavery had splintered the Baptist and Methodist denominations, and others, along sectional lines. Within Southern states, the church became a pillar of support for slaveholding society. According to historian Albert J. Raboteau, “slavery was not only

⁶⁹ Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 1.

⁷⁰ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

⁷¹ Janet Duitsman Cornelius, “When I Can Read My Title Clear”: *Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 69-70.

⁷² Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 130.

⁷³ Burke, *On Slavery’s*, 243; see also Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The ‘Invisible Institution’ in Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 181.

⁷⁴ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 243.

⁷⁵ Milton D. Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 59, and George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, vol. 1, Eighth Edition (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 571-72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

accepted as an economic fact of life, but defended as a positive good, sanctioned by Scripture and capable of producing a Christian social order.”⁷⁸

Supported by the religious establishment, many Missouri slaveholders encouraged their enslaved workers to attend weekly church services.⁷⁹ In rural areas, like Newton County, enslaved people often attended the same church as their owners.⁸⁰ This practice varied by location, but one former slave, Mary Bell, described a typical arrangement in which white people went to church in the morning and the enslaved attended services in the afternoon.⁸¹ Ministers and preachers encouraged African American congregants to be hardworking, conscientious, frugal, and obedient and presented Bible passages in support of their sermons.⁸² The concepts of obedience and duty became popular themes that were weaved into church sermons and presented to enslaved people during the antebellum decades.⁸³ Slaveholders also attempted to control the behavior of their slaves through compulsory conversions.⁸⁴ In the Deep South, for example, plantation owners believed that evangelical conversion would create a docile and compliant workforce.⁸⁵ Similar opinions were held by small slaveholders in Missouri who believed that converted slaves, that is, those who turned from a sinful to a righteous life, “would be more content in their enslavement and less likely to rebel or flee.”⁸⁶ Some slaves rejected the religious beliefs that were thrust upon them by their white owners.⁸⁷ These enslaved African Americans obtained agency, and sometimes brief interludes of independence, by organizing informal—and often secret—prayer meetings in slave cabins and at other secluded locations.⁸⁸ Participation, however, often brought the risk of punishment and retribution by bondholders.

With the end of the Civil War, Evangelical Protestantism emerged as the predominant religious denomination in both the South and Middle West.⁸⁹ Baptists and Methodists, who emphasized the conversion of the unchurched, that is, those not belonging to a specific religious institution and even those active in other denominations, were the two dominant religious groups proselytizing in Missouri.⁹⁰ Baptists were particularly successful at evangelizing in rural areas. The religious group, which emphasized the authority of the Bible, conversion by immersion, independence of local congregations, and missionary outreach, often organized outdoor revivals and camp meetings during summer months as a way to recruit new converts.⁹¹ These community

⁷⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 152.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 219, 290.

⁸⁰ Harrison Anthony Trexler, “Slavery in Missouri 1804-1865” (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 1914), 91; see also Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 219.

⁸¹ Grace E. White, “She Loves Army Men,” in *Missouri Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavers in Missouri from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Federal Writers’ Project 1936-1938 (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2006), 30.

⁸² Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 245.

⁸³ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 142, and Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 213.

⁸⁴ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 153.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 245-47.

⁸⁷ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 239.

⁸⁸ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 212-15.

⁸⁹ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, xiii; see also Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 222-27.

⁹⁰ Rafferty, *Historical Atlas of Missouri*, 59; see also Cornelius, “When I Can Read My Title Clear,” 20.

⁹¹ Cornelius, “When I Can Read My Title Clear,” 20, and Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, xvii, 152; see also Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 243-44, 249.

gatherings served as a supplement to weekly church services and often attracted both white and black attendees.⁹² Many African Americans embraced Christianity and the evangelical missionaries who circulated throughout the South after emancipation.⁹³ These religious activities provided newly freed blacks with a sense of identity, communal support, and personal esteem.⁹⁴

George W. Carver converted to Christianity as a young boy on the Moses Carver farm. According to his written recollections, the “simple” conversion occurred when he was either eight or ten years old, which would date the episode to approximately 1873 or 1875.⁹⁵ Carver’s spiritual awakening was a defining moment in his life and later informed his view on the natural world and his environmental thinking. To invert an observation made by historian Paul S. Sutter, Carver had a deep connection with religion, which he later talked about in natural terms.⁹⁶ Carver’s religious conversion occurred while working and appeared to have been inspired by an innocent interaction with a young white friend. Describing the event to Isabelle Coleman, a potential biographer, on July 24, 1931, Carver recalled:

I was just a mere boy when converted, hardly ten years old. There isn’t much of a story to it. God just came into my heart one afternoon while I was alone in the “loft” of our big barn while I was shelling corn to carry to the mill to be ground into meal.

A dear little white boy, one of our neighbors, about my age came by one Saturday morning and in talking and playing he told me he was going to Sunday school tomorrow morning. I was eager to know what a Sunday school was. He said they sang hymns and prayed. I asked him what prayer was and what they said. I do not remember what he said; only remember that as soon as he left I climbed up into the “loft,” knelt down by the barrel of corn and prayed as best I could. I do not remember what I said. I only recall that I felt so good that I prayed several times before I quit. My brother and myself were the only colored children in that neighborhood and of course, we could not go to church or Sunday school, or school of any kind. This was my simple conversion, and I have tried to keep the faith.⁹⁷

The conversion episode is intriguing because it occurred independent of Moses and Susan Carver and the African American church—neither was mentioned in the story.⁹⁸ Carver’s description of

⁹² Burke, *On Slavery’s Border*, 249.

⁹³ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 152.

⁹⁴ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, xiv-xv.

⁹⁵ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver in 1897”; see also G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹⁶ See foreword by Paul S. Sutter in Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, xi.

⁹⁷ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

the conversion also illustrated how organized religion, at least in the mid-1870s in rural Missouri, was often segregated by race. African Americans had limited opportunities for religious schooling and were often turned away from local congregations. Of course, in the years that followed, racial segregation would be further entrenched through Jim Crow laws in the South. Finally, Carver's conversion was nondenominational.⁹⁹ Although Carver intermingled with several church congregations as he matured, including Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian, he initially approached God as an individual and non-sectarian act.¹⁰⁰

George W. Carver continued to experience other revelations and epiphanies from God during his childhood, including an oft-repeated incident in which he desired a small pocketknife and later found one on the farm after being directed to the spot by God.¹⁰¹ Carver's divine revelations led some biographers to describe his faith as universalistic and mystical.¹⁰² Whatever the case, Carver's spirituality, which began with a personal conversion and continued to develop and progress through revelations, emerged as a defining character trait for the young boy. Religious faith provided Carver with inner strength, self-esteem, dignity, and direction. Carver later spoke of how he often overcame difficult situations by "trust[ing] God and press[ing] on."¹⁰³ One of his favorite Bible passages was Proverbs 3:6: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."¹⁰⁴ Writing about some of the early challenges he faced, Carver noted:

There is one thing that I trust that you will constantly keep in mind. It is a verse in the Bible that has helped me very much when things seemed so dark I could not see through them. It is this: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." I look for direction and for guidance, and it is sure to come.¹⁰⁵

Another comforting passage for Carver was Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."¹⁰⁶ Carver never spoke about how he first came upon these particular passages in the Bible, but he certainly could have heard them at outdoor revival meetings, from evangelical missionaries, from personal Bible study, or by contact with other white and black people of faith. Carver's faith was also expressed in his choice of music. Writing to Isabelle

⁹⁸ Forbes Brown, who was born on December 25, 1872, and was a contemporary of George W. Carver, asserted, in a letter to the National Park Service in the 1950s, that "Uncle Moses and his wife were never known to attend [church] services." See Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," November 26, 1957, 25-31, GWCNM Library.

⁹⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 184, 269.

¹⁰¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 17-18.

¹⁰² Linda O. Hines, "White Mythology and Black Duality: George W. Carver's Response to Racism and the Radical Left," *Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 2 (April 1977): 134.

¹⁰³ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver in 1897."

¹⁰⁴ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁵ G. W. Carver to Robert Thompson, August 8, 1935, Reel 19, Frame 0538-0539, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁶ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Coleman in July 1931, Carver indicated that his favorite song was *Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?*¹⁰⁷ The hymn, which was written by Thomas Shepherd, an English clergyman, in the 1690s, was intended to provide comfort to those facing hardship: “Must Jesus bear the cross alone / And all the world go free? / No, there’s a cross for everyone / And there’s a cross for me.”¹⁰⁸

Indeed, Carver’s conversion may have also served as a coping mechanism for the young boy. Donald G. Mathews noted, for example, that “blacks did not deny they had been wronged, but their Christianity kept them from being destroyed by that fact.”¹⁰⁹ An infant who had been born to enslaved parents and later orphaned with no memories of his biological mother or father could be excused for being angry at life and the cruel hand he was dealt. But Carver, by most accounts, was not. When asked to comment in January 1922 about the painful experiences he suffered as a child, and why he was not bitter, Carver explained:

Bitterness poisons our systems and drives the Christ out of us. It puts us into the position of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. When you get in touch with the great creative power you just cannot get bitter because there is so much of beauty, so much of sublimity in the world that you can’t waste your time getting bitter.¹¹⁰

Carver’s spirit of forgiveness and compassion—something that he discovered on the Moses Carver farm—would remain with him through his entire life.

The Paradox of George’s Early Childhood

The question of whether George Carver had a grim childhood on the Moses Carver farm is perhaps the most important question—and certainly the most difficult to answer. During the first decade of his life, Carver was a frail child who was plagued by multiple illnesses. He and his older brother, James, were orphaned and possibly lived in a former slave cabin. Their caretakers, Moses and Susan Carver, who neither adopted them nor became their legal guardians, required that both boys work on the farm as laborers. As Carver made clear, there were many sorrows that he and his brother shared.¹¹¹ At the same time, however, Carver was given a unique freedom to explore the 240-acre property.¹¹² A good part of his time, by his own account, was spent roaming the surrounding woods and collecting flowers, rocks, and insects. Yet this activity also proved paradoxical. Describing his childhood interests to Lucy Cherry Crisp, a biographer, in the 1930s, Carver recalled that he “had playmates, but my tastes were different and I did not play with them much. . . . I was often lonely. I loved the great out of doors, the children did

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Shepherd, *Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?* (London, 1693).

¹⁰⁹ Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 229.

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Caudill, “A Scientist in God’s Workshop,” *Our Young People*, January 16, 1922, Reel 59, Frame 0845-0847, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹¹ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

¹¹² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 15.

not.”¹¹³ Carver also learned how to read on the farm and experienced a religious awakening—indicating that he had some exposure to religious thought or activities.

Interestingly, Carver’s memory of his childhood would change over time. His first biographical sketch, prepared in 1897 at the age of thirty-two, described an early life that, although difficult, was also inspiring. During the late 1930s, as he approached the end of his days, Carver seemed to take the view that his early childhood was tragic. Writing to Dr. L. C. Fischer, the co-founder of the Crafford Long Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, in September 1937, Carver noted that “there are many things we cannot understand, my life is probably one of the best examples of it. Its very beginning was tragic and has continued more or less throughout life.”¹¹⁴ In later years, Carver also took to referring to himself as “a poor defenseless orphan.”¹¹⁵ In some ways, however, this was as much a denunciation on contemporary life as a criticism of his childhood on the Moses Carver farm. Writing to a young admirer, circa 1937, Carver noted:

They don’t realize that a poor colored orphan child, struggling to make a living, wafted hither and thither, often among strangers, not knowing where he would spend the night, or where he would get the next meal, have no time to think of important incidents in his life. The young people feel that they have a hard time now, but they may thank their stars that they did not have to come along during the troublesome time when I came on the scene.¹¹⁶

At the same time, however, Carver remained interested in his family history, such as it was, throughout his life. Carver freely spoke about Moses and Susan Carver to biographers and was always excited to learn new information about his childhood from a long-forgotten acquaintance. Writing to Mary Kane Hill Cantey, circa 1937, about the activities of one biographer, Carver noted: “He is at my old birthplace now making investigations. Just what he will unearth I am unable to say, but I am watching his movements with much interest.”¹¹⁷ If Carver’s life story was grim, it was also one that he enjoyed retelling.

¹¹³ GWC to L. C. Crisp, Folder 154.20, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, Collection No. 154, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC.

¹¹⁴ G. W. Carver to Dr. L. C. Fischer, September 14, 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0021, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 4, 13.

¹¹⁶ G. W. Carver to Miss Clopton, undated, Reel 25, Frame 0453, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁷ G. W. Carver to Mary Kane Hill Cantey, ca. 1937, Reel 21, Frame 1112, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Chapter Four

WANDERING IN SEARCH OF AN EDUCATION

George W. Carver left the Moses Carver farm circa 1876 and, for the next fourteen years, until September 1890, lived and worked in nine midwestern towns including Neosho and Kansas City, Missouri; Fort Scott, Olathe, Paola, Minneapolis, Highland, and Beeler, Kansas; and Winterset, Iowa. This self-imposed journey, which began as a quest for schooling and was undertaken between the approximate ages of eleven and twenty-five, paralleled a broader migration of African Americans during Reconstruction and its immediate aftermath.¹ Carver began his odyssey in Neosho, living with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, the first of several African Americans—including Ben and Lucy Seymour, Willis and Delilah Moore, and Clara C. Duncan—who provided shelter or guidance to the adolescent. Even with this vital support and assistance, as well as mutual aid from other members of the freed black community, Carver's travels were not without trauma, most notably when he witnessed the lynching and immolation of Bill Howard, a black man, on March 27, 1879. Carver also suffered racial prejudice. Initially admitted into Highland University in Highland, Kansas, he was rejected upon arriving once school officials learned of his race. Carver developed professional and financial literacy during this period, serving as a stenographer at Union Depot, the main train station in Kansas City, and later homesteading 160 acres in Ness County, Kansas. Ultimately, however, Carver's search for an education remained unfulfilled, as indicated by his abrupt departure from Kansas in the late summer or early fall of 1888.

An Education Revolution for African Americans

Educational opportunities for African Americans were tightly controlled during the antebellum period. Between the 1830s and 1865, whites were discouraged from teaching basic literacy skills to African Americans, either enslaved or freed, and four states—Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia—enacted laws prohibiting the education or providing of books to slaves.² The details of each law varied, but the intent was clear—knowledge and learning needed to be prevented, as it could serve as a path to freedom for the enslaved. Missourians agreed and, in 1847, amended their own state constitution to include a provision restricting the teaching of slaves, free blacks, and mulattos.³ During the Civil War, there were limited efforts to educate African Americans in St. Louis, Missouri, organized by the American

¹ Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist & Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 304.

² Janet Duitsman Cornelius, “*When I Can Read My Title Clear*”: *Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 32-33, 64.

³ William E. Parrish, *A History of Missouri. Volume 3 1860 to 1875* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 158, and R. Douglas Hurt, *Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 247.

Missionary Association in cooperation with the Western Sanitary Commission and the U.S. Army.⁴

With the end of the war and beginning of Reconstruction, the Republican effort to reform and rebuild the South, emphasis was turned to improving economic and educational opportunities for African Americans. The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, or Freedmen's Bureau, which was established on March 3, 1865, built schools for newly freed blacks throughout the postbellum South. The Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified on July 9, 1868, extended civil rights to all African Americans and guaranteed due process and equal protection under the law. Indeed, the constitutional amendment was partly designed as a safeguard to ensure that educational opportunities would not be denied to African Americans in the future. At the local level, restrictions on the education of African Americans were rescinded, and new statewide education systems were established in Southern states.

In Missouri in 1865, the General Assembly, or state legislature, introduced a series of laws requiring communities to maintain separate, or segregated, schools for African Americans once they had more than twenty, and later fifteen, black children between the ages of five and twenty-one.⁵ Although the intent of the law seemed evident, many local school boards, populated with white members, evaded the regulations and channeled public money to white institutions.⁶ For example, local school boards would underestimate the number of African Americans living in their community or reject requests for new black schools by arguing that competent teachers were not available. As a result, in 1868, the state legislature authorized the state superintendent of schools, Thomas A. Parker, to usurp the power of local school boards if communities refused to implement the new education laws.⁷ The following year, the state legislature decided that school districts with less than fifteen African Americans could be combined to meet the population requirement. By 1875, the black school population in Missouri was nearly fifteen thousand, or roughly 35 percent of the total African American population.⁸

At the same time, literacy emerged as a grassroots movement—an essential goal for many newly freed African Americans.⁹ Those who had been refused the right to learn to read and write, or those who had learned secretly or covertly, pressed forward with their education, while others joined their ranks in an effort to obtain skills necessary for survival and upward mobility.¹⁰ Formerly enslaved African Americans understood, quite rightly, that literacy would enable them to navigate the white world and the new society that was being fashioned from the

⁴ Lawrence O. Christensen, "Schools for Blacks: J. Milton Turner in Reconstruction Missouri," *Missouri Historical Review* 76, no. 2 (January 1982): 121. See also Gary R. Kremer, *James Milton Turner and the Promise of America: The Public Life of a Post-Civil War Black Leader* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 25.

⁵ Robert Irving Brigham, "The Education of the Negro in Missouri" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1946), 82-84, and Parrish, *A History of Missouri. Volume 3*, 160-66; see also *Historic Structure Report, 1872 Neosho Colored School, 639 Young Street, Neosho, Missouri, Final Report* (Kansas City, MO: Susan Richards Johnson & Associates, Inc., July 17, 2012), 13.

⁶ Brigham, "The Education of the Negro in Missouri", 83.

⁷ Parrish, *A History of Missouri. Volume 3*, 165. See also Edwin Joseph Benton, "A History of Public Education in Missouri" (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1965), 68-69.

⁸ Brigham, "The Education of the Negro in Missouri," 91.

⁹ Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 34.

¹⁰ Cornelius, "When I Can Read," 2, and Williams, *Self-Taught*, 20, 140.

embers of the Civil War.¹¹ The ability to read was crucial for understanding contracts, terms of employment, and business arrangements and for leasing and purchasing land.¹² Still, other African Americans sought literacy for purely individualistic reasons, including the desire to read and teach the Bible or to communicate with family and friends who had moved in search of work or a better life.¹³

The construction of black schoolhouses became a defining characteristic of Reconstruction, as was the arrival of Northern teachers in Southern communities to teach African Americans.¹⁴ Yet, at the same time, educational opportunities remained a luxury for freed blacks and were often uneven across the South.¹⁵ Larger communities and urban areas typically had more and better-equipped schools. In rural areas, black churches or abandoned cabins were employed as classrooms, and school supplies were often begged or borrowed from white schools or received sporadically as gifts from Northern donors.¹⁶ African Americans who lived in rural areas could also expect to travel longer distances to schools and most likely received training from teachers who were less qualified than their urban counterparts.¹⁷ Finally, many Southern states experienced a backlash, certainly political and in some cases violent, against African American schools in the mid-1870s, which corresponded to the trailing end of Reconstruction. In Missouri, the decline of Republican power beginning in 1870 and the wholesale transfer of political power back to the Democratic Party in 1874 meant that public education was remanded back to recalcitrant local communities that opposed the extension of educational opportunities to African Americans.¹⁸

Education at Locust Grove School and Neosho Colored School

It was within this environment that George W. Carver, at the approximate age of ten or eleven, began his quest for a formal education circa 1876.¹⁹ Like many episodes in Carver's life, the events surrounding his first foray into the classroom are disputed among biographers. It is believed that for perhaps a week or two, and maybe even less, Carver and his brother James attended a public school known as Locust Grove School, which met at the Locust Grove Church, located approximately one mile from the Moses Carver farm.²⁰ Although the school, which had

¹¹ Cornelius, "When I Can Read," 3.

¹² Ibid., 143.

¹³ Ibid., 3, 143, and Williams, *Self-Taught*, 41.

¹⁴ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., 128, 149.

¹⁶ Gary R. Kremer and Brett Rogers, "African American Schools in Rural and Small Town Missouri: the Missouri River Valley," June 30, 1999, 4, 9, African American Schools Phase 1, Final Report, Missouri State Historic Preservation Office; see also Williams, *Self-Taught*, 110.

¹⁷ Kremer and Rogers, "African American Schools," 10-11.

¹⁸ Ward M. McAfee, *Religion, Race, and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 137.

¹⁹ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd," Reel 1, Frame 0007, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁰ Anna Coxe Toogood, "Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri," prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 25; Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 148; and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 17-18. An alternate version of the episode is

been organized in the late 1860s or early 1870s, should have been available to all residents in Marion Township, either white or black, local members of the community seemed to have thought differently.²¹ Shortly after arriving, James and George learned that they could not continue their studies because of their race.²² One contemporary of George W. Carver, whose wife attended the school in the 1870s and who was later interviewed by the National Park Service in the 1950s, stated that James and George remained at Locust Grove School for three days before being turned away.²³ Speaking of the experience more than fifty years later, in July 1931, George W. Carver recalled the sting of racial prejudice: “My brother and myself were the only colored children in that neighborhood and of course, we could not go to church or Sunday school, or school of any kind.”²⁴

There is some evidence that Carver may have also briefly attended a Sunday school taught by Flora Abbott at the Locust Grove Church. Forbes Harris Brown, a childhood friend of George W. Carver, reported in an oral interview conducted in the 1950s that his brother, Will Brown, went with Carver to the Sunday school at Locust Grove Church.²⁵ According to Brown, the Sunday school class was opened to George W. Carver as a “concession . . . to serve as a salve to the conscience of the community because of strong religious belief.”²⁶ Although later biographers, including Linda O. McMurry, repeated this claim, the exact circumstances could not be confirmed and appear to contradict Carver’s own recollections.²⁷ Whatever the case, the episode indicates that racial prejudice did exist in the small community and served as a roadblock to black education—a fact that Carver remembered years later.

It appears that both Moses and Susan Carver were supportive of Carver’s educational aspirations. Even though his first foray to school was unsuccessful, the Carvers seemed to have allowed George and James the freedom to pursue an education and may have also agreed to pay the subscription fees necessary to attend the public school.²⁸ Answering a series of questions posed by Raleigh H. Merritt, an early biographer, in July 1927, Carver claimed that Moses and Susan Carver had been pragmatic about the subject of schooling. Merritt specifically asked George W. Carver whether “Mr. and Mrs. Carver . . . [were] willing for you to leave at such an early age?” Carver responded affirmatively that “Yes they were, they said, I would never be able

provided in Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 13.

²¹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 8-9.

²² *Historic Structure Report*, 25-26.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁵ *Historic Structure Report*, 25. See also Robert P. Fuller and Merrill J. Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” November 26, 1957, 26-27, GWCNM Library.

²⁶ Forbes Harris Brown to Aubrey Neasham, National Park Service, May 20, 1952, 1-5, Record Group 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, National Archives and Records Administration-Central Plains (Kansas City).

²⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 18.

²⁸ Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery’s Border: Missouri Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 83-84.

to do hard work and they wanted me to get an education.”²⁹ Pragmatism, of course, is not the same as support, but in George’s case it appears as though the Carvers were genuinely concerned that he would have difficulty surviving as an adult without some type of formal education to compensate for his poor physical health. Finally, some scholars have argued that the Carvers engaged Steven L. Slane, the white teacher at Locust Grove School, for a few months in 1876 to tutor the two boys after they were barred from the school.³⁰ Slane, who had recently arrived in Diamond, Missouri, and was boarding with the Baynham family, would later spend three decades as a teacher working in Newton County Schools.³¹

George W. Carver’s next stop on his journey for an education took him farther afield and set in course a chain of events that led to his exodus from the Moses Carver farm and, ultimately, from Missouri. Around 1876, at the approximate age of eleven, Carver was permitted by Moses and Susan Carver to travel eight miles south to Neosho, Missouri.³² Neosho, which was founded in 1839 and served as the seat of Newton County, had a population of 2,023 people, 129 of whom were African American.³³ During the 1870s, the small town served as the manufacturing center of the county and included a foundry and machine shop, planing mill and lumber yard, sawmill, tobacco factory, livery stable, brick kiln, brewery, distillery, wagon shops, smelting furnace, nursery, two broom factories, a marble works, and several mines.³⁴ Carver, however, sought out a small one-room house located at 639 Young Street, later known as the Neosho Colored School, which served as a school for African Americans.³⁵ Circa 1922, Carver wrote of the experience:

At age 19 years my brother left the old home for Fayetteville, Arkansas. Shortly after, at the age of 10 years, I left for Neosho, a little town just 8 miles from our farm, where I could go to school. Mr. and Mrs. Carver were perfectly willing for us to go where we could be educated the same as white children. I remained here for about two years.³⁶

Carver’s reference to his brother’s departure to Fayetteville, Arkansas, as a prelude to his own move to Neosho is an important detail that is often dismissed by Carver biographers.

²⁹ “The Foregoing Is a List of Written Questions Made Up by Raleigh H. Merritt, The Answers to Which Were Made by Dr. George W. Carver in His Own Hand Writing,” July 1927, Reel 1, Frame 0022, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 19, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 13.

³¹ *Historic Structure Report*, 26.

³² “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

³³ Thomason and Associates, “Research Design Architectural and Historical Survey Neosho, Missouri,” 1991, 2, Folder Research Design Inventory Form List, Newton 145-B, Survey: Neosho 1991, Missouri State Historical Preservation Office.

³⁴ *History of Newton, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald Counties, Missouri* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1888), 339-40.

³⁵ *Twenty-Ninth Report of the Public Schools of the State of Missouri for the Year 1878* (Jefferson City: Carter & Regan State Printers and Binders, 1879), 157-58, Folder Annual Report of Public Schools 1867–, Box 1, Dept. of Elem. & Sec. Education, Annual Reports of Common Schools, 1845–1865, State Government Documents, Missouri State Archives.

³⁶ George Washington Carver, “A Brief Sketch of My Life,” ca. 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0011, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Unfortunately, little information is known about James's life in the decade before his death in June 1883. If James did move to Fayetteville, which is located approximately eighty miles south of Diamond, Missouri, he remained there only a short time and ultimately decided to join his brother in school in Neosho.³⁷ George W. Carver later implied as much to Lucy Cherry Crisp in the early 1930s, writing, "My brother James stayed at home much of the time when he was attending school, as he had a horse and it was only eight miles away."³⁸ Finally, although George W. Carver stated that he remained in Neosho for approximately two years, on other occasions he contradicted himself, writing that he stayed in Neosho for only nine months.³⁹



Figure 12. Tintype photograph of James Carver, circa 1878. *George Washington Carver National Monument*.

The Neosho Colored School served as an African American school from circa 1872 through 1891.⁴⁰ The school property, which was located on the outskirts of Neosho in a newly incorporated residential addition adjacent to a small town known as Neosho City, consisted of a modest hall-and-parlor house on a small building lot near the intersection of Young and Morrow Streets.⁴¹ Neosho City, which was also sometimes known as Martling, New Neosho, North Neosho, or Newtown, was incorporated into Neosho in 1881.⁴² The residence, which was built circa 1870, was originally owned by James M. Vawter. On September 16, 1872, the Neosho School Board purchased the property from Vawter for \$200, and the existing building was converted into a schoolhouse for African Americans.⁴³ The institution, which became known locally as the "colored school," was one of five African American schools operating in Newton County during the early 1870s.⁴⁴ The total enrollment at the Neosho Colored School during the 1870s is not

³⁷ Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver: An American Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1943), 26.

³⁸ George W. Carver to Lucy Cherry Crisp, August 3, 1934, Folder 154.3.a, 1933-1942, Box 3, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, Collection No. 154, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC (hereafter Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers); see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 21.

³⁹ See, for example, Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0015, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰ *Historic Structure Report*, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17, 31, 64. The northern section of the city

⁴² Thomason and Associates, "Survey Report, Architectural and Historical Survey, Neosho, Missouri," January 31, 1991, Final Report, Newton 145-A, State Historic Preservation Office, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 31, 40-43, 55.

⁴⁴ John Monteith, *7th Annual Report of Missouri Public Schools* (Jefferson City: Regan and Carter State Printers, 1873), 277.

known but probably ranged from twenty-five to forty people per year, although one oral history stated that class size may have reached seventy-five students in 1876–77.⁴⁵ The ages of the students were probably also quite varied—especially since African American education was in its infancy—and the school may have had students aged five through twenty-one.⁴⁶ It was also unclear which grades were taught at the school, but one former student, interviewed in the late 1940s, reported that the school went up to grade six.⁴⁷ Finally, little is known about attrition and attendance rates for students, or even specifics about textbooks utilized, although by the 1880s it appeared that *McGuffey Readers* had become standardized at the school.⁴⁸ Whatever the case, the curriculum was probably quite informal, and instruction was no doubt tailored to the needs of each individual student.



Figure 13. Stephen S. Frost, circa 1880s.
George Washington Carver National Monument.

The Neosho Colored School had a succession of teachers during its first few years, including Marion J. Scholes, Mrs. Danforth, and M. C. (Florence) Fry.⁴⁹ In January 1875, Stephen S. Frost, a young Black man who was no more than twenty-five years old, assumed teaching duties at the school. Frost had the unique distinction of being George W. Carver’s first formal teacher. Frost was born in Tennessee circa 1850 and by 1870 was living in Springfield, Missouri, with a white family, whose daughter, Emma Baker, was a school teacher.⁵⁰ Frost’s academic training was probably limited, and historian Gary R. Kremer has opined that “[he] likely had little or no formal training as a teacher.”⁵¹ Nonetheless, Frost was well liked in the classroom and appeared to have inspired and motivated his students. Calvin Jefferson, who attended the Neosho Colored School in the 1870s and was a classmate of Carver, observed that Frost “was held in high regard and esteem by all of the parents and citizens, both white and black in the City of Neosho as an upstanding Christian man. He taught Christian principles along

with his work in the school.”⁵² Carver would have certainly appreciated the latter attribute but best remembered, when asked years later, the inadequate and meager conditions of the schoolhouse. Writing to Raleigh H. Merritt in July 1927, Carver explained, “The first school

⁴⁵ *Historic Structure Report*, 21, 55-56.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-56. See also Kremer, *James Milton Turner*, 33-37.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

⁵⁰ *Historic Structure Report*, 19-20.

⁵¹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 12.

⁵² “Calvin Jefferson Recalls Carver’s Life at Neosho, Missouri,” Calvin Jefferson to Austin W. Curtis, April 6, 1939, 1, George Washington Carver National Monument Library, Diamond, Missouri (hereafter GWCNM Library).

was simply the small, crude town school poorly equipped [in] every way.”⁵³ Carver stated that the schoolhouse was furnished with “crude wooden benches and other rickety furniture.”⁵⁴ In spite of these poor conditions, Carver’s abilities were recognized on at least one occasion by his teacher. On Friday, December 22, 1876, Carver received a reward of merit from Frost, recognizing his “perfect studies and good conduct during the past week.”⁵⁵

George W. Carver remained at the Neosho Colored School for only a short time, perhaps between nine and twenty-four months spanning between 1877 and 1878. The exact reasons why Carver left the school are not known, but one theory holds that he became disillusioned with Frost, whom he believed knew even less than himself.⁵⁶ Whether this was true is not known, but it does speak to a problem that many African Americans faced in their quest for a formal education in the postbellum South. Qualified teachers were often difficult to find, especially in rural areas, and African Americans were suspicious of the white educational system.⁵⁷ Heather Andrea Williams noted, for example, that “the opportunity to attend school was so limited and so prized, students and parents discriminated among schools and teachers, choosing the ones they thought could best meet their educational goals.”⁵⁸ Whatever the case, the Neosho Colored School served dual purposes. Carver emerged from the school more capable and with an enduring commitment to learning. As he famously quipped in 1897, “This simply sharpened my appetite for more knowledge.”⁵⁹



Figure 14. Mariah Watkins, circa 1870s.
George Washington Carver National Monument.

George W. Carver’s arrival in Neosho marked the end of his home life with Moses and Susan Carver and his time on the Moses Carver farm.⁶⁰ Shortly after starting classes at the Neosho Colored School, Carver began lodging, first during the weekdays and then on weekends, with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, a middle-aged African American couple who owned a small house on a corner lot a few doors down from the school.⁶¹ The new relationship became a transformative experience for Carver and connected him, for the first time, with a mutual aid network that existed among the freed black community.⁶² Accounts varied on how Carver first met the Watkinses. According to Lawrence Elliott, a biographer, Carver was spied by Mariah one morning while he was

⁵³ “The Foregoing Is a List.”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ James Carver’s Elementary Grade Merit Card (Dr. Carver’s Brother), Box 1, Austin W. Curtis Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 20; see also Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 14.

⁵⁷ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 12.

⁵⁸ Williams, *Self-Taught*, 150.

⁵⁹ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

⁶⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 19.

⁶¹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 13-14; see also *Historic Structure Report*, 29.

⁶² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 20.

sitting on a pile of kindling and eating sunflower seeds. Mariah lived across the yard from the schoolhouse and struck up a conversation with the young boy.⁶³ Lucy Cherry Crisp, another biographer, asserted that Carver slept in a barn in Neosho for several nights and then went door-to-door looking for work and a place to stay until he found the Watkinses.⁶⁴ He certainly came to value the Watkinses' kindness, writing in July 1927 that "I lived with a family who let me attend the school for this I worked in their house, indeed Mr. and Mrs. Watkins took me in just as one of the family."⁶⁵

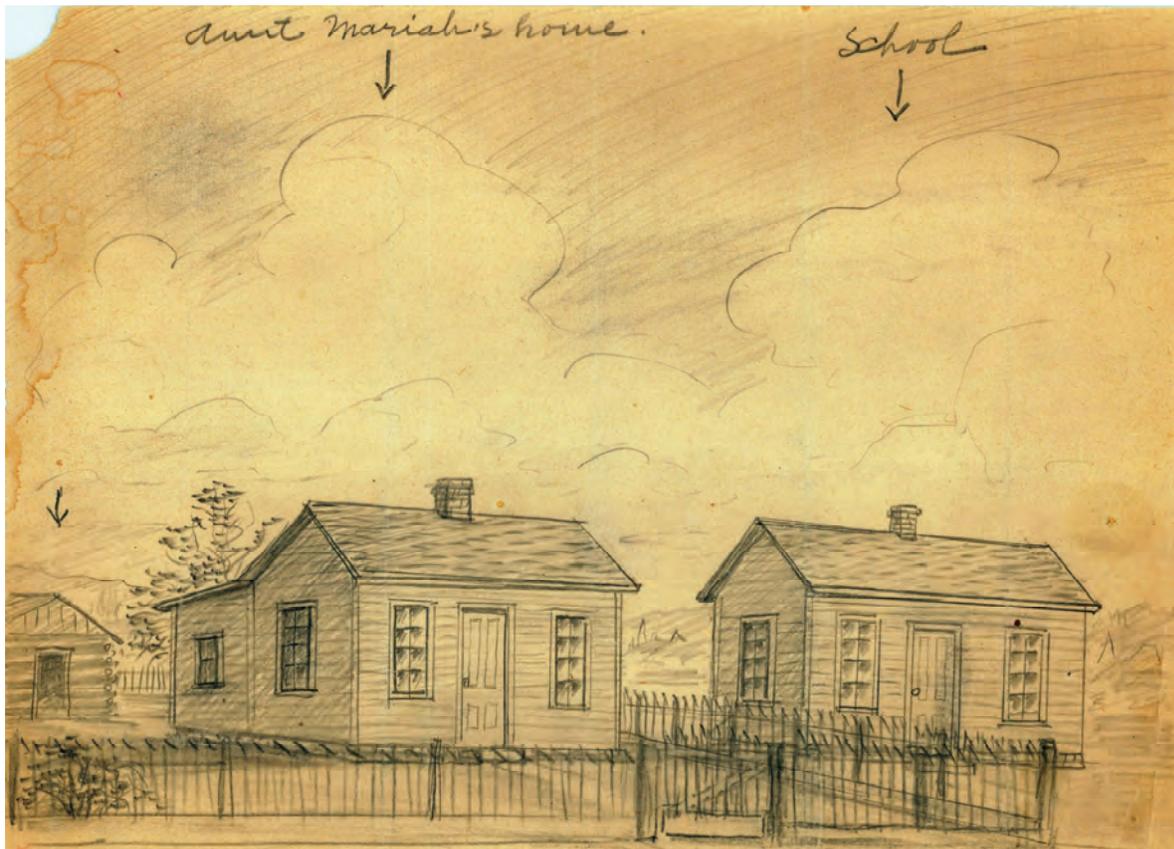


Figure 15. Carver's Sketch of the Watkins House and Neosho Colored School, circa 1937. *George Washington Carver National Monument*.

Mariah Watkins was a remarkable individual and a living legend in the Neosho community. She was born enslaved in North Carolina circa 1824 and took the surname of her owner, Robert Scales, a white physician who was also reported to be her father.⁶⁶ Dr. Scales trained the young Mariah in midwifery, and she may have also served as a nurse during the Civil War.⁶⁷ After obtaining her freedom, Mariah married Andrew Watkins, another former slave, in St. Louis, Missouri, on November 14, 1872. Andrew, who was a laborer, was born in Virginia

⁶³ Lawrence Elliott, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 28-32.

⁶⁴ Lucy Cherry Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, II-1-II-3, Folder 154.16.f, Box 16, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

⁶⁵ "The Foregoing Is a List."

⁶⁶ "'Aunt' Mariah Watkins: Area Midwife Remembered," *Newton County Roots* 14, no. 1 (March 2002): 13, and Vesta-Nadine Robertson, "Midwife to Greatness," *Ozarks Mountaineer* 23, no. 11 (December 1975): 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

and was enslaved in Texas before emancipation.⁶⁸ The Watkinses moved to Neosho, then known as Martling, in the mid-1870s and purchased a house near the Neosho Colored School in 1874.⁶⁹ Mariah served as a midwife in Neosho and the surrounding community for more than forty years, assisting both white and black families.⁷⁰ Mariah and Andrew, who did not have children, were affectionately known in the community as Aunt Mariah and Uncle Andy.⁷¹

One of the best depictions of Mariah was provided by Thomas Hart Benton, the American Regionalist painter who was born in Neosho on April 15, 1889. The youngest child of a wealthy Neosho family, Benton was also the grandnephew of U.S. Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who served as his namesake. Mariah oversaw the daily chores in the Benton household for almost five years during the 1890s. Describing Mariah in an unpublished memoir in the 1970s, Benton recounted:

Around three in the afternoon she would go back to her home, a neat, flower bedecked place, on the far side of town where she kept her “office.” She drove to and from her home and her “appointments” in a narrow buggy, the seat barely holding her, hitched to a yellow, palomino-like pony. She was probably the best known woman in Neosho and certainly the most necessary. For years she delivered nearly every child born in the town.⁷²

In addition to her role as midwife, which was quite lucrative—one source reported that she charged ten dollars for every baby delivered—Mariah also helped organize special events such as weddings and parties.⁷³ During the summer months, the Watkinses offered to care for children whose parents were vacationing.⁷⁴ Taken together, these activities enabled the Watkinses to achieve economic success and to become one of the few African American families in Neosho who owned property during the 1870s.⁷⁵ More importantly, the Watkinses served as an example to Carver of a successful black family. The fact that both Mariah and Andrew had also been enslaved would have made the lesson all the more potent for the young boy. One interesting anecdote that is linked to Carver’s stay with the Watkinses pertains to an enslaved woman who Mariah knew as a young girl. The woman, named Libby, was able to read and covertly taught others, including Mariah. The Watkinses implored Carver to “learn all you can, then be like Libby. Go out in the world and give your learning back to our people.”⁷⁶ Although the story is probably romanticized, it does speak to the motivation and sense of purpose that the Watkinses fostered in Carver. Years later, Austin W. Curtis, Carver’s assistant at Tuskegee

⁶⁸ “‘Aunt’ Mariah Watkins,” 13.

⁶⁹ Robertson, “Midwife to Greatness,” 20.

⁷⁰ “‘Aunt’ Mariah Watkins,” 13.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Thomas Hart Benton, “The Intimate Story – Boyhood,” Roll No. 2325, Frame 1025-1026, Thomas Hart Benton Papers, 1906-1975, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁷³ Robertson, “Midwife to Greatness,” 21; see also “‘Aunt Maria’ Wakens A Part of Neosho Story,” *Neosho Daily News*, July 2, 1958, 116.

⁷⁴ Robertson, “Midwife to Greatness,” 20.

⁷⁵ *Historic Structure Report*, 29.

⁷⁶ Elliott, *Carver: The Man Who Overcame*, 34.

Institute from 1935 to 1943, recalled that he referred to Mariah Watkins as “a tremendous influence in his life.”⁷⁷

Mariah and Andrew Watkins were also deeply religious and further diversified Carver’s spiritual experiences, introducing him to the African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁷⁸ Lawrence Elliott asserted that Mariah provided Carver with his first Bible, “a leather volume already worn by much loving use.”⁷⁹ Like Moses and Susan Carver, the Watkinses also expected George Carver to work for his boarding. The exact household chores that Carver was assigned are not entirely known but probably included laundering, washing, ironing, and cooking.⁸⁰ Carver later recalled that he also “kept the house, garden, milked the cow, and did the clothing for Mr. Watkins.”⁸¹ That said, Mariah Watkins especially could be a stern task master.⁸² One schoolmate, Calvin Jefferson, who lived near the Watkinses, remembered that Carver was not allowed to play during recess like other students but rather was required to go back to the Watkinses’ house to wash clothes and study, simultaneously.⁸³ Interestingly, the issue of whether the Watkinses disciplined Carver during his time in their household has not been explored by previous biographers. Thomas Hart Benton observed that Mariah was not afraid to use corporal punishment when necessary. In his memoirs, Benton stated that “until I was five years old she bathed, clothed and whacked me. About the earliest thing I can recall is a session in our tin bathtub when Aunt Mariah, impatient with my repudiation of soap, laid into me with a wet wash rag.”⁸⁴ Of course, it does not take much to extrapolate that if Watkins “whacked” Benton, the youngest son of a white Neosho lawyer, she probably also used similar punishment on Carver and her other charges. Thus, Carver’s arrival in an African American faith-based family may explain his later statement that “sunshine and shadow were profusely intermingled.”⁸⁵

Journey through Fort Scott, Olathe, Paola, and Minneapolis, Kansas

Around 1878, George W. Carver, who was now approximately thirteen years old, left Neosho and traveled seventy-five miles northwest to Fort Scott, Kansas.⁸⁶ He undertook the two-week journey with an African American family, apparently at the suggestion of Mariah Watkins, who believed that Carver could obtain better schooling in Kansas.⁸⁷ Interestingly, Carver’s decision to leave Missouri appeared to have been a spontaneous act undertaken without

⁷⁷ Toby Fishbein, “Interview with Austin W. Curtis,” March 3, 1979, 12, Folder Oral History Interview – Austin W. Curtis 1979, Box 2, George Washington Carver Papers, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Ames, IA (hereafter Iowa State University).

⁷⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 20, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 14.

⁷⁹ Elliott, *Carver: The Man Who Overcame*, 34.

⁸⁰ “A Part of Neosho Story,” 116, and Robertson, “Midwife to Greatness,” 21; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 20.

⁸¹ Lucy Cherry Crisp Interview Notes, 154.20, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

⁸² Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 14.

⁸³ “Calvin Jefferson Recalls Carver’s Life,” 2.

⁸⁴ Benton, “The Intimate Story – Boyhood”; see also Justin Wolff, *Thomas Hart Benton: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 27-28.

⁸⁵ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

⁸⁶ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

⁸⁷ Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, II-6-II-8.

consultation with either Moses or Susan Carver, or perhaps even his brother.⁸⁸ Describing the episode in 1897, Carver explained:

I managed to secure all my meager wardrobe from home, and when they heard from me I was cooking for a wealthy family in Ft. Scott, Kansas, for my board, cloths and school privileges. Of course they were indignant and sent for me to come home at once, to die, as the family doctor had told them I would never live to see 21 years of age.⁸⁹

Asked by Raleigh H. Merritt in July 1927 if he had planned in advance to go to Fort Scott, Carver replied, “No, I was anxious to go anywhere that I could get better school facilities.”⁹⁰ Carver’s strong religious faith, and particularly his belief in divine guidance as demonstrated by his frequent reference to Proverbs 3:6, Philippians 4:13, and Psalms 119:18, enabled him to face this new adventure with determination and possibly even excitement.⁹¹

At the same time, Carver’s journey to Fort Scott, and even his previous move from Diamond Grove to Neosho, tied him to a larger movement of African Americans that occurred following the end of Reconstruction. The movement, known as the Kansas Fever Exodus, saw the relocation of approximately 6,000 African Americans, mainly from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas but also from other states, to Kansas between March and May 1879.⁹² The exodus was caused by multiple factors—blacks were pulled to Kansas, the one-time residence of abolitionist John Brown, by the possibility of better economic opportunities and were pushed from the South because of the reemergence of violence that corresponded to the removal of federal troops from former secessionist states after the Compromise of 1877.⁹³ African Americans found an array of new economic opportunities in Kansas, but as one historian observed, “Kansas was no Canaan, but it was a far cry from Mississippi and Louisiana.”⁹⁴ Some new migrants chose to settle in predominately black towns, including Dunlop colony, established in 1878 by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, one of the leaders of the exoduster movement. Another black town, Nicodemus, became “an important symbol of the African American capacity for self-governance and economic enterprise.”⁹⁵ Other settlers formed black communities in predominately white cities and took jobs as domestic servants, waiters, mechanics, teamsters, laborers, and maids.⁹⁶ Gary R. Kremer noted that Fort Scott was a popular exoduster destination,

⁸⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 14-15. An alternative account of the episode asserts that George W. Carver consulted with Moses and Susan Carver, and others, before leaving for Kansas. See Fuller and Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” 30-31.

⁸⁹ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

⁹⁰ “The Foregoing is a List.”

⁹¹ G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹² Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 184-201, and Suzanna M. Grenz, “The Exodusters of 1879: St. Louis and Kansas City Responses,” *Missouri Historical Review*, October 1978, 55-56.

⁹³ Painter, *Exodusters*, 184-201; Grenz, “The Exodusters of 1879,” 55-56; and Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 13.

⁹⁴ Painter, *Exodusters*, 260.

⁹⁵ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 137-43.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

as demonstrated by a 60 percent population growth in the African American community between 1870 and 1880—from 682 to 1,083—compared to a 30 percent population growth in the white community during the same time.⁹⁷

Sometime after arriving in Fort Scott—the exact date is not known—Carver obtained employment at 211 S. Judson Street, working for an African American blacksmith named Felix Payne. A city directory published in Fort Scott dated 1879 confirmed Carver’s presence in the city, listing him as “Carver, George, wks, 211 s. Judson.”⁹⁸ Cora Scott, born in 1872 and a longtime Fort Scott resident, remembered Felix Payne as “very free hearted” and “always helping somebody.”⁹⁹ Carver probably spent about nine months in Fort Scott, working for the Payne family and attending an African American school, known as the Fort Scott Colored School, on the first floor of the former U.S. Army General Hospital at Fort Scott.¹⁰⁰ He may have also worked at the Wilder House hotel as a launderer and at a nearby grocery store.¹⁰¹ Carver later wrote that “every year I went to school, supporting myself by cooking and doing all kinds of house work in private families.”¹⁰² It was unclear which wealthy Fort Scott family Carver cooked for in exchange for “board, clothes and school privileges.” However, in the late 1940s, several people were mentioned as acquaintances of the famous scientist during his stay in Fort Scott, including “Mose Holt, Anthony Hawkins and Jerry Owens and Miss Alice McDermott, a neighbor.”¹⁰³

If Carver enjoyed his time in Fort Scott, his enthusiasm was shattered after the events he witnessed on March 27, 1879. Bill Howard, a black man, was accused of raping a twelve-year-old white girl.¹⁰⁴ After Howard was found hiding in an abandoned coal mine, he was taken to the Bourbon County jail to await formal charges and criminal prosecution. Before this happened, however, an angry mob, estimated at almost a thousand people, gathered outside the jail and forced their way into the prison.¹⁰⁵ According to the *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, which reported on the event, Howard was taken from the jail and “a rope was tied around his neck, and amid thundering yells and shouts, . . . [Howard] was dragged by a hundred hands a distance of five blocks and hung to a lamp-post on the northeast corner of the public square.”¹⁰⁶ After the lynching, some individuals took Howard down and “in spite of resistance and objection of the more calm and peaceable portion of the crowd,” proceeded to burn his body “in a fire of dry goods boxes and coal oil.”¹⁰⁷ Carver, who witnessed most of the episode, having been on an errand to the local drugstore, was profoundly traumatized and departed from the town that

⁹⁷ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 17-18.

⁹⁸ James A. Moulton, *Fort Scott Directory, 1879*, GWCNM Library.

⁹⁹ “Interview with Mrs. Cora Knight,” Fort Scott, Kansas, June 1, 1948, 32, List of Correspondence, Itinerary on Early Life of Carver 1948, Box 006.132, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁰⁰ George W. Carver to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, 1, Folder Correspondence, Carver-Pammel (1918-1924), Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University; “Interview with Mrs. Cora Knight,” 32.

¹⁰¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 22.

¹⁰² Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

¹⁰³ Marian C. Amott to J. Henry Smith, May 20, 1948, Reel 58, Frame 0245, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁵ Matt Dodge, “George Washington Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” *True West*, April 1984, 24-25.

¹⁰⁶ “Tremendous Tragedy: A Mad Mob Drags the Demon Down to Death,” *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, March 27, 1879, 4, GWCNM Library; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

evening.¹⁰⁸ He later wrote that he remained in Fort Scott “until they lynched a colored man, dragged him by our house and dashed his brains out onto the sidewalk. As young as I was, the horror haunted me and does even now. I left Fort Scott and went to Olathe, Kansas.”¹⁰⁹

After Fort Scott, George W. Carver, who was now approximately fourteen years old, traveled north to Olathe, in Johnson County, Kansas, located just southwest of Kansas City.¹¹⁰ He most likely arrived in the town in early April 1879, but it may have taken him several weeks, or even more, to make the eighty-two-mile journey. Olathe had approximately four thousand residents when Carver arrived, with African Americans comprising 16 percent of the population.¹¹¹ Although he later asserted that he attended the public school in Olathe for two years, in reality he probably only remained in Olathe for less than a year—and certainly no later than June 1880.¹¹² As in Neosho and Fort Scott, Carver assumed housework and other odd jobs to pay for his room, board, and school fees. Writing to Raleigh H. Merritt in July 1927, Carver stated that he “did cooking, washing, ironing, cleaned carpets, and did all kinds of work for a living.”¹¹³ He may have also shined shoes and cooked for Jerry Johnson, the local barber.¹¹⁴

In Olathe, Carver resided with Ben and Lucy Seymour, a black couple who became, according to Linda O. McMurry, Carver’s “second set of black parents.”¹¹⁵ Ben, who was fifty, was a well-digger.¹¹⁶ His wife, Lucy, who was forty-four, may have operated a small laundry business. Both of them had been born in Virginia and moved to Kansas from Missouri. The Seymours also had one child, Eddie Seymour, who was eleven when George Carver joined the household in mid-1879.¹¹⁷ Lora Page, a longtime Olathe resident whose mother lived with Lucy Seymour, recalled that the Seymour house was located on Cherry Street between Poplar and Santa Fe Streets.¹¹⁸ Lucy was described as a devoted Christian and was apparently well respected in the community.¹¹⁹ Certainly the Seymours provided Carver with kindness and encouragement, as well as employment; whether they also became surrogate parents is more difficult to determine. What is clear, however, is that Carver received mutual aid and support from the freed black community and that this aid often came initially from women.¹²⁰ Of course,

¹⁰⁸ Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 25.

¹⁰⁹ Fuller and Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” 48.

¹¹⁰ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹¹² “Moses Carver,” Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 444, dwelling 293, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA-DC), accessed through Ancestry.com; see, for example, Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0015, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹³ “The Foregoing Is a List”; Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0019, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 23.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “Lucy Seymour,” 1855 Kansas Territory Census, Microfilm Reel K-1, Kansas State Historical Society, accessed through Ancestry.com.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ “Interview with Mrs. Lora Page,” June 22, 1948, 100, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹¹⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24.

¹²⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 20.

Carver's chief goal in Olathe was to advance his education, and to this end he matriculated into the town's public school. In Olathe, white and black residents attended the same school in the 1870s, but the local school board also created a separate school for black students with the arrival of several hundred African Americans between 1879 and 1881.¹²¹ Rashey B. Moten, who was born in 1868 and was a classmate of Carver in Olathe, recalled that Carver entered the African American school, known as the Old Rock School or Stone School, in the middle of the semester, and the two finished the fourth grade together.¹²² Moten also asserted that Carver taught a Sunday school class at the Methodist Church.¹²³

The Seymours left Olathe in the early months of 1880 and migrated to Minneapolis, Kansas, approximately 175 miles west, possibly in search of farmland to homestead.¹²⁴ Upon their departure, Carver drifted thirty miles south to Paola, Kansas, a small farming hamlet in Miami County. He lived on East Miami Street and boarded with Willis and Delilah Moore, a black couple, and their extended family, which included two children, Julia and George Moore; their mother-in-law, Lucinda Moore; and a nephew, Lewis Braddock.¹²⁵ Willis, who was thirty-eight, was a laborer; his wife, Delilah, thirty-six, was a homemaker. According to the 1880 federal census, which was enumerated on June 14, 1880, Carver worked in a laundry.¹²⁶ Interestingly, the census also listed his age as fifteen, which again supports a birthdate of circa 1865.¹²⁷ In February 1949, Mamie E. Lee Shripe, who knew Carver as a small child, provided reflections on his wanderings during this period:

George kept moving on to other towns doing many odd jobs, but learning the hard way. Always among strangers. But he learned to do laundry work and would fix up a crude place in an old shack or building and try to do laundry work. He would not get much to do so he would move on to some other town. He was not always met with a welcome.¹²⁸

Unfortunately, there are few verifiable details about Carver's brief stay in Paola beyond the information provided by the census enumerator. He probably attended the Paola Normal School, but this is more assumption than fact.¹²⁹ Whatever the case, Carver appeared to have missed the Seymours and, once he was able to do so, followed the family to Minneapolis, Kansas.

¹²¹ Randall B. Woods, "Integration, Exclusion, or Segregation? The 'Color Line' in Kansas, 1873-1900," *Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (April 1983): 187-88.

¹²² Fuller and Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," 57.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 23.

¹²⁵ "George Carver," Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 444, dwelling 293, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Mrs. Mamie E. Lee Shripe, "Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver," February 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0624-0626, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁹ Toogood, "Historic Resource Study," 45.

George W. Carver remained in Minneapolis, a small town in central Kansas, just north of Salina, for approximately four years, from the late summer of 1880 through October 1884.¹³⁰ The town, which was the seat of Ottawa County, had approximately one thousand residents, of whom less than two dozen were African American, according to Gary R. Kremer.¹³¹ Carver boarded with the Seymours in a small house on Second Street and may have also resided with Charles Cooper while he attended high school in town.¹³² In Minneapolis, Ben Seymour transitioned from well-digging to farming, and Lucy Seymour served as a nurse for Dr. James McHenry, a white physician and town founder who also operated a small pharmacy.¹³³ Carver did odd jobs for McHenry and also continued to take in washing, laundry, and ironing to earn his living.¹³⁴ Perhaps because of his innate intellect or kind personality, he made a number of connections among the white community and often spent Sunday evenings with Chester Rarig and his family.¹³⁵ Indeed, Minneapolis appeared to have been very agreeable to Carver, who was probably fifteen when he arrived, and became the first place since the Moses Carver farm where he lived for more than one or two years.

Carver attended high school in Minneapolis and may have also studied Latin and Greek.¹³⁶ McHenry seemed impressed with the young man and apparently also loaned him books.¹³⁷ On May 5, 1922, Carver stated that in Minneapolis he “nearly finished . . . [his] high school work.”¹³⁸ Mrs. J. E. Ewart, a Minneapolis resident who taught high school and knew Carver well, said that he started classes in Minneapolis in 1880 and was in the seventh and eighth grades in 1883 and 1884.¹³⁹ This was further confirmed by Nellie Davis Cawley, one of Carver’s classmates in Minneapolis, who recalled that his high school teacher was Miss Helen Hecker. The high school was apparently “a frame building with four rooms in two stories.”¹⁴⁰ Cawley recalled that Carver played the accordion or mouth organ for the Friday afternoon school program and also did embroidery. She also observed that he was different from the other black students. Cawley noted, “He was quiet and did not mix with others in the playground. He would just stand and look around. He was very studious and very appreciative of his teachers.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24.

¹³¹ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 19.

¹³² Crim Q. Thompson to Mrs. Jessie P. Guzman, June 10, 1948, Reel 58, Frame 0261, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹³³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 23.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 16-17.

¹³⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹³⁶ Carver, “1897 or Thereabouts.”

¹³⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 23.

¹³⁸ Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0015, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹³⁹ “Interview with Mrs. J. E. Ewart,” June 7, 1948, 54, List of Correspondence, Itinerary on Early Life of Carver 1948, Box 006.132, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 20.

¹⁴¹ “Interview with Mrs. Cawley,” June 7, 1948, 55, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, and Fuller and Mattes, “The Early Life of George Washington Carver,” 60-61.

Faith and religion also remained an important part of Carver's life, and on July 29, 1883, he was examined and accepted as a member into the Presbyterian Church.¹⁴² The event was also significant because it was the first occasion in which Carver utilized the full name of "George Washington Carver."¹⁴³ Mark D. Hersey and Rackham Holt observed that Carver adopted his middle initial in Minneapolis due to postal delivery confusion with another resident of the same name.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, Carver rarely utilized "Washington" in professional and personal correspondence, preferring instead "Geo. W. Carver" or "G. W. Carver."



Figure 16. The Presbyterian Church of Minneapolis, March 1956. Carver was accepted as a member of the congregation on July 29, 1883. *George Washington Carver National Monument*.

George W. Carver also acquired financial and business literacy in Minneapolis, procuring three small loans, establishing a bank account, and eventually even purchasing real estate. At some point during his stay in the town, he established a small laundry business, recalling, circa 1922, that "in working for others I had learned the minutiae of laundering. I opened a laundry for myself; got all I could do."¹⁴⁵ The laundry business, which may have been associated with a local general store, occupied "a small shack in a ravine popularly known as Poverty Gulch."¹⁴⁶ Beginning on July 29, 1880, Carver obtained three loans from the Citizens National Bank of Minneapolis, Kansas. The first loan, which totaled \$43.00, was supplemented by \$54.45 on September 20, 1880, and \$156.45 on December 16, 1880.¹⁴⁷ Although the

exact utilization of the capital is not known, it is assumed that he used it to improve or expand his laundry business. On December 24, 1881, more than a year after arriving in the town, Carver established a deposit account with Citizens National Bank.¹⁴⁸ The fact that it was Christmas Eve, of course, spoke to the possibility that the initial deposit of \$27.00 may have been a gift. On January 2, 1884, Carver, who was now approximately nineteen, paid \$100.00 for lots 8 and 9

¹⁴² Fuller and Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," 60; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24.

¹⁴³ "George Washington Carver," Church Register, July 29, 1883, GWCNM Library.

¹⁴⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17, and Holt, *Carver: An American Biography*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁵ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

¹⁴⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 23; see also Fuller and Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," 62-63.

¹⁴⁷ G. W. Lempenau to Superintendent, July 5 1957, File 3: 8/6/1/8-08, General Files, Carver from his birth until 1896, Dunn Library, Simpson College, Indianola, IA.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

in block 12 of MacKenzie's Second Addition in downtown Minneapolis.¹⁴⁹ He only retained the lots for a little over nine months, however, selling them to Isaac W. King for \$500.00 on October 20, 1884.¹⁵⁰ Although some biographers, including Rackham Holt, suggested that Carver was cheated in the transaction, this appears to be more fiction than fact and was probably just another apocryphal tale about Carver's past.¹⁵¹ What is known, however, is that Carver departed Minneapolis and the state of Kansas shortly thereafter, traveling approximately 185 miles east to Kansas City, Missouri.¹⁵²

The Sting of Racism and the Success of a Homestead

Before moving to Kansas City, or perhaps en route, George W. Carver returned to the Moses Carver farm, possibly in 1884.¹⁵³ The exact chronology is difficult to reconcile, and a complete record of Carver's visits to Diamond Grove is still lacking. There is some evidence that Carver may have also returned to his birthplace even earlier, perhaps during the summer of 1879, 1880, or 1881, before James Carver's death on June 14, 1883, and Susan Carver's death on January 23, 1892, but this is unsubstantiated.¹⁵⁴ In later years, Carver spoke of at least one return visit to the Moses Carver farm before his brother's passing:

At the age of nineteen years I went back to see my brother and Mr. and Mrs. Carver. I had not improved in stature, as I rode on a half-fare ticket. The conductor thought I was rather small to be travelling alone. I spent the summer here, and returned to Minneapolis, Kansas where I finished my high school work.¹⁵⁵

In August 1949, Forbes H. Brown, an insurance broker in Oakland, California, who was raised on a farm in Marion Township, described a visit by Carver circa 1879.¹⁵⁶ Brown, who would have only been approximately seven years old at the time, recalled that Carver "had grown much in height; wore a striped gray suit, appeared to be about 14."¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, there is some indication that the 1879 visit, if it did occur, was not particularly welcoming for Carver. According to Brown, "as George bade each of us good-bye

¹⁴⁹ "Deed Record, Book M, Page 466, Ottawa County, Kansas," January 2, 1884, 1-2, GWCNM Library; see also Fuller and Mattes, "The Early Life of George Washington Carver," 59.

¹⁵⁰ "Deed Record, Book M, Page 467, Ottawa County, Kansas," October 20, 1884, 1-2, GWCNM Library.

¹⁵¹ Holt, *Carver: An American Biography*, 40-41.

¹⁵² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24.

¹⁵³ Carver, "A Brief Sketch," and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹⁵⁴ Rose Carver Danner, *A History of Christian Carver and Frederick Danner and Their Descendants* (Willows, CA: privately printed, 1931), 30, and Clarence H. Schultz to Mrs. B. B. Walcott, November 29, 1955, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

¹⁵⁶ "Forbes Brown," Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 16, dwelling 131, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

¹⁵⁷ Forbes H. Brown to J. Henry Smith, August 18, 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0707-0708, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Brown's recollection of the visit, provided seventy years after the fact, must be utilized with caution as its veracity has not been confirmed.

with a warm handshake he expressed appreciation for the invitation to be with us for it was the only one he had received during his brief visit home.”¹⁵⁸ Whether this was a reference to Moses and Susan Carver or to others within the community is not known. Other Carver visits to the farm, in 1888 and 1900, have also been alleged, notably by Elza Winter and Otto Taggart, respectively, but again these appear to be more conjecture than documented fact.¹⁵⁹

One visit that is known to have occurred, having been reported in several local newspapers, including the *Daily Searchlight* and the *Neosho Daily Democrat*, was Carver’s trip to Neosho in August 1908.¹⁶⁰ During the visit, which was scheduled as part of a speaking tour through Illinois and Tennessee, Carver saw Mariah Watkins and presented a lecture at the Second Baptist Church.¹⁶¹ Linda O. McMurry has written that Carver inquired about Moses Carver during the visit.¹⁶² This is supported by newspaper accounts, which noted that Carver intended to “visit Mr. Carver of Galena, Kansas, his mother’s old master.”¹⁶³ Once again, however, it was unclear if Carver went to Diamond Grove or merely remained in Neosho.

The purported visit by George W. Carver to the Moses Carver farm in 1884 may have been, in part, to collect his brother’s effects.¹⁶⁴ Although James may have joined George at the Neosho Colored School, it appeared that they separated again when George began lodging with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, and certainly after he left for Fort Scott, Kansas. For his part, James appeared to have remained on the Moses Carver farm after his younger brother departed. The 1880 federal census, for example, listed him as a twenty-one-year-old farm laborer in the employment of Moses Carver.¹⁶⁵ At some point, James appeared to have migrated west to Seneca, Missouri, perhaps in search of work, and eventually became a plasterer or laborer for a railroad company.¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, James contracted smallpox shortly thereafter and died at the age of twenty-three in June 1883.¹⁶⁷ George Carver was informed of his brother’s passing by mail, probably by Mariah Watkins, and later lamented that “being conscious as never before that I was left alone, I trusted God and pushed ahead.”¹⁶⁸ Of course, the dynamics of the purported 1884 visit are not known, but it appeared that Moses and Susan Carver welcomed George and, upon his departure, gave him the handwritten bill of sale he received upon purchasing Mary in

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ CHS, “Summary of Various Statements,” G.W. Carver’s Visit to Moses Carver Farm (April 28, 1959), GWCNM Library.

¹⁶⁰ “Hear a Neosho Boy,” *Neosho Daily Democrat*, August 19, 1908; “Prof. Geo. W. Carver Is Traveling in the West,” *Colored Alabamian*, August 29, 1908; and “Professor G. W. Carver,” *Daily Searchlight*, August 11, 1908.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 50.

¹⁶³ “Professor G. W. Carver,” *Daily Searchlight*, August 11, 1908.

¹⁶⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ “Moses Carver,” Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Marion, Newton, Missouri, p. 22, dwelling 193, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com.

¹⁶⁶ “The James Carver Grave,” *Newton County Roots* 3, no. 3 (September 1991): 21. James Carver’s grave is located in Seneca, Newton County, Missouri.

¹⁶⁷ Robert P. Fuller, “Report on Project #4: Moses Carver and His Family,” October 18, 1955, 6, GWCNM Library.

¹⁶⁸ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.” On the role of Mariah Watkins, see “The James Carver Grave,” 21.

October 1855, a spinning wheel utilized by his mother to spin flax, and an “old candle lamp,” or parlor lamp.¹⁶⁹

George W. Carver may have also observed several transformations to the Moses Carver farm. A new farmhouse, now referred to as the Moses Carver late period dwelling, was constructed circa 1881.¹⁷⁰ The two-story building, which incorporated a living room, kitchen, fireplace, and chimney, replaced the previous living quarters that had been utilized by Moses and Susan Carver and, later, Mary, James, and George.¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, there is no proof that George Carver stayed with Moses and Susan in the farmhouse, or even visited the farm for more than a few days. Another change was new tenants—Robert Gilmore and, later, Lee Winter rented the northwest corner of the farm to grow wheat.¹⁷² For his part, Moses Carver remained on the farm through 1900, when he joined relatives, probably due to failing health, in Garden Township, Kansas.¹⁷³ Moses Carver died on December 20, 1910, and was later returned to Missouri to be interred in the Carver cemetery.¹⁷⁴

When George W. Carver arrived in Kansas City, Missouri, in late 1884, he enrolled in a small business college and took a course in “shorthand and typing.”¹⁷⁵ Some biographers, including McMurry and Hersey, asserted that the vocational school was founded by Chester Rarig, a close acquaintance of Carver from Minneapolis, but this is undocumented.¹⁷⁶ Carver next took employment as a stenographer and typewriter at Union Depot, the main train station in Kansas City, a massive building that combined Gothic and Victorian architecture and housed express offices, shipping and railroad agents, and a restaurant.¹⁷⁷ He worked at the Union Depot for only a short time, however, writing in 1897 that “the thirst for knowledge gained the mastery and I sought to enter Highland College at Highland, Kansas.”¹⁷⁸ He requested admission by mail and was pleased to hear that he had been accepted.¹⁷⁹

When Carver arrived in Highland, Kansas, circa 1885, he was approximately twenty years old. The town, located eighty miles northwest of Kansas City, was a small community of about six hundred residents.¹⁸⁰ Highland University (now Highland Community College) traced its history to a small Presbyterian mission founded in 1837 by Reverend S. M. Irvin. The

¹⁶⁹ “The Foregoing Is a List.” Roy Porter believed that George W. Carver obtained the spinning wheel from Moses Carver much later—during a visit to Galena, Kansas, in either 1909 or 1910. See “Interview with Roy Porter, Believed to be of Joplin, Missouri,” Moses Carver, July 14, 1953, GWCNM Library.

¹⁷⁰ Orville W. Carroll, *Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data Section, Part II, Moses Carver Late Period Dwelling, Building No. 5, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri*, March 1966, 8, GWCNM Library.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2-7.

¹⁷² Fuller, “Report on Project #4,” 4.

¹⁷³ “Moses Carver,” Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Garden, Cherokee, Kansas, p. 91, dwelling 442, Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of the Census, NARA-DC, accessed through Ancestry.com, and “Moses Carver Is Dead,” *Daily Illinois State Journal (Springfield, IL)*, December 22, 1910, 5; see also Fuller, “Report on Project #4,” 9.

¹⁷⁴ Fuller, “Report on Project #4,” 9.

¹⁷⁵ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 45.

¹⁷⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 24, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver,” and Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 45.

¹⁷⁸ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver.”

¹⁷⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 24.

¹⁸⁰ Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, III-6.

missionary school, supported by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, sought to assimilate, through religious and academic training, members of the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska, an American Indian tribe.¹⁸¹ By the early 1880s, the school, officially chartered as Highland University rather than Highland College as indicated by Carver, was still quite small, consisting of only five full-time faculty members and 139 students.¹⁸² The school curriculum was quite diverse, encompassing Latin, Greek, mathematics, geology, history, natural philosophy, English literature, chemistry, astronomy, and even Hebrew.¹⁸³ Carver, unfortunately, would not join this privileged group. Upon arriving, he was refused entrance by H. D. McCarty, the school's president and a professor of mathematics and natural sciences.¹⁸⁴ Recalling the episode, circa 1922, Carver wrote: "I was admitted, went, but when the President saw I was colored he would not receive me. I had spent nearly all of my money, and had to open a laundry here."¹⁸⁵ Carver was certainly disappointed by the turn of events and, after possibly seeking refuge in a barn, was able to find work with the Beelers, a white family that "operated a fruit farm south of town."¹⁸⁶ He later testified to the Clerk of District Court of Ness County on June 21, 1888, that he also worked as a farmer in Doniphan County, Kansas. Unfortunately, the exact dates he undertook this activity are not known.¹⁸⁷

George W. Carver remained in Highland through late 1885, and possibly into early 1886. He apparently cooked and kept house for the Beelers and also fell back once again on his laundry skills.¹⁸⁸ Carver may have also helped mend fences and prune trees on the Beeler farm.¹⁸⁹ The Beelers were an interesting family—pure Westerners: part farmers, part merchants, part land speculators, and part boosters. The family patriarch, Bolivar Beeler, was born in Marion County, Indiana, in August 1826 and eventually migrated to Missouri before arriving in Highland, Kansas.¹⁹⁰ Together with his wife, Helen Abbott, and children and nephews, including Elemer E. Beeler, Frank Beeler, and John F. Beeler, Bolivar platted a town in Ness County in western Kansas in March 1887 named Beelerville (later Beeler), approximately 330 miles southwest of Highland.¹⁹¹ The family, operating through the Arkansas Valley Town Company and joined by George S. Redd, another investor, offered "speculative, building and . . . business

¹⁸¹ *Catalogue of the Officers and Students, of Highland University, Kansas* (Atchison, KS: Haskell & Son, 1882).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *The Nuncio, The Catalog Number 1908, Highland University* (Highland, KS: Highland University, 1908), 9. In January 2013, History Associates Incorporated contacted the registrar's office at Highland Community College. They provided contact information for Craig Mosher in the Alumni Office (the HCC Foundation). Dr. Mosher stated that the school had previously searched for an application or acceptance file for George Washington Carver but had been unable to locate anything of interest (telephone conversation, Kimberly Silvi and Craig Mosher, January 10, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

¹⁸⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 24; Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17; and Dodge, "Carver: Kansas Homesteader," 25.

¹⁸⁷ "Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof," June 21, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

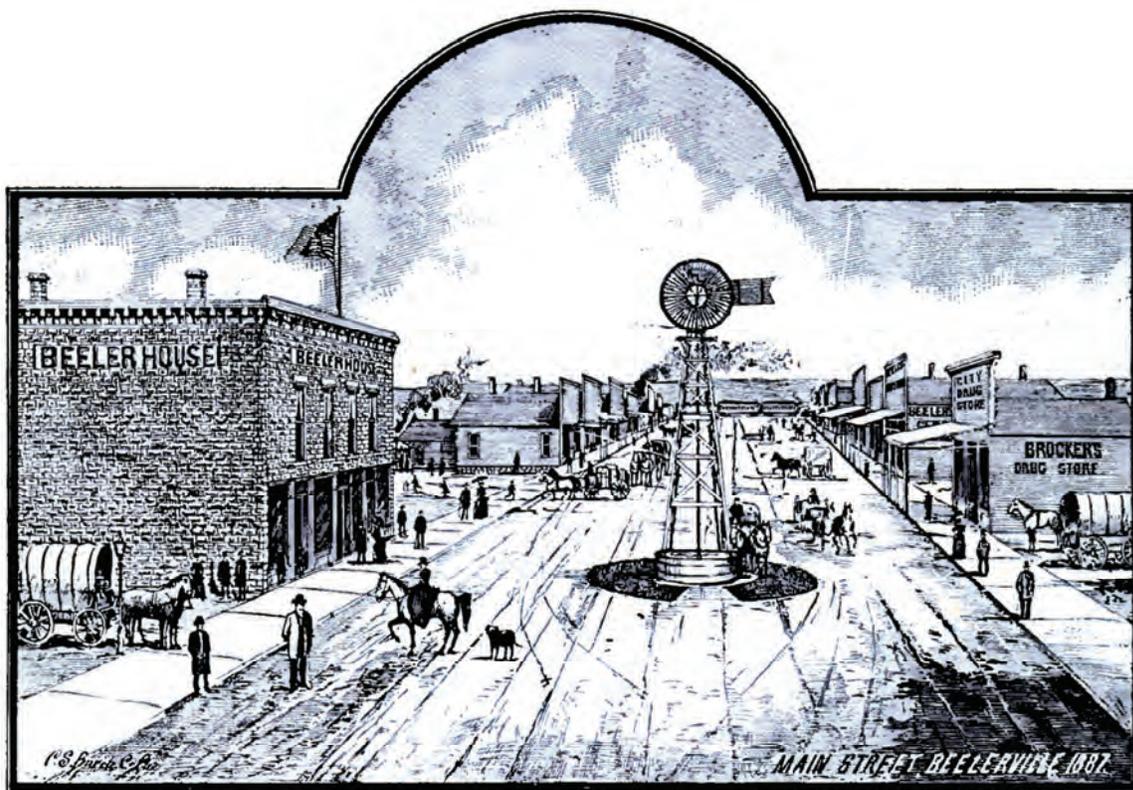
¹⁸⁸ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

¹⁸⁹ Dodge, "Carver: Kansas Homesteader," 25, and "Interview with Mrs. Harriet Smith," June 25, 1948, 109, List of Correspondence, Itinerary on Early Life of Carver 1948, Box 006.132, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁹⁰ Frank L. Beeler Houghton, "Bits About Beelers," January 12, 1967, 2, Unit ID 46976, Carver, George Washington, Kansas State Historical Society.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

lots for \$125 to \$150, and residence lots at \$10 to \$75.”¹⁹² The family sought to profit not just from the selling of property, however; it also owned the main hotel in Beelerville, the local coal trade, the general store, and other essential businesses.¹⁹³ The Beelers had begun their endeavor by building a sod hotel, known as Beeler House, in Ness County.¹⁹⁴ The structure, which was constructed of grass sod, served as a halfway house for the stagecoach and also catered to laborers constructing the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company railroad line to Dighton, Kansas.¹⁹⁵ The family next built a more permanent structure, known as the Beeler Stone Hotel, which served as the centerpiece of the new community.¹⁹⁶ Throughout this period, the Beelers continued to promote their town and recruit new residents from Highland.¹⁹⁷ With the promise of work, or perhaps in search of a different adventure, Carver migrated to Beeler, Kansas, in the spring or summer of 1886 and took a position at a hotel.¹⁹⁸ He was now approximately twenty-one years old.



VIEW OF MAIN STREET, BEELERVILLE, LOOKING SOUTH.

Figure 17. Beelerville, Kansas, circa 1885. *Hand-Book of Ness County, Kansas* (Chicago: C. S. Burch Publishing Company, 1887).

¹⁹² *Hand-Book of Ness County, Kansas* (Chicago: C. S. Burch Publishing Company, 1887), 36.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Houghton, “Bits About Beelers,” 7-8.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹⁷ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹⁹⁸ Houghton, “Bits About Beelers,” 9.

Shortly thereafter, Carver also began working for George H. Steeley, who operated, together with Harry Gregg, the Gregg-Steeley Livestock Ranch.¹⁹⁹ Carver served as a handyman for Steeley and also learned the techniques necessary to build sod houses—by far the most environmentally friendly buildings ever constructed. Together with Steeley, Carver plowed long, deep furrows in the prairie and cut sod bricks, each measuring 4 × 8 × 16 inches, which were then utilized to construct “barns, poultry houses, tool sheds, and other buildings needed on a farm.”²⁰⁰ The buildings were next trimmed with a spade and then “whitewash[ed] with lime to prevent dirt from sifting in.”²⁰¹ Jim McKinnis, who lived in Ness County and was about fourteen when he first met Carver, recalled that Carver did the cooking and washing for Steeley and Gregg. McKinnis remembered him as a great debater and “better educated than most of the people around. He always talked about getting money, getting money to go to school. He would help other people with work, but worked steadily with Steeley and Gregg.”²⁰² Interestingly, an alternative account of Carver’s migration to Ness County was provided by Frank L. Beeler Houghton, a Beeler descendant. Houghton noted in an unpublished memoir prepared in January 1967 that “George had been brought to Western Kansas as lackey by two young men, the Steele brothers, who became bored with the western way of life and returned east, leaving George to take care of their interests in the homestead.”²⁰³ Whether Carver had oversight of Steeley’s business interests is not known. What is known, however, is that Carver undertook another challenge shortly thereafter, one which would occupy the next two years of his life.²⁰⁴

On August 30, 1886, George W. Carver purchased a relinquishment on a homestead entry and began improvements on 160 acres of public land in the southeast quarter of Section 4 of Township 19-S, Range 26-W, Sixth Meridian, Kansas.²⁰⁵ He later characterized the land, located approximately a mile south of Beeler, as “prairie farm and grazing land. Equally good for either.”²⁰⁶ Unlike the Moses Carver farm in Diamond Grove, Missouri, however, which included both prairie and timberland, Carver’s homestead had no native timber, making subsistence much more problematic.²⁰⁷ In addition, his farm had no spring or creek to provide drinking water, and when he later dug for groundwater, he was unable to find any.²⁰⁸ Finally, Carver had moved to an area of the Great Plains that suffered cyclical droughts during the summer months and severe weather, even blizzards, during the winter months.²⁰⁹ It was not the best location to start a farm.

¹⁹⁹ Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 26.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*; see also Houghton, “Bits About Beelers,” 7.

²⁰¹ Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 26.

²⁰² “Interview with Mr. McKinnis,” June 4, 1948, 44, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

²⁰³ Houghton, “Bits About Beelers,” 9.

²⁰⁴ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 45.

²⁰⁵ “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof”; see also Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 25.

²⁰⁶ “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof,” and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 18.

²⁰⁷ Justin D. Hoffman and Jerry R. Choate, “Distribution and Status of the Yellow-Faced Pocket Gopher in Kansas,” *Western North American Naturalist* 68, no. 4 (2008): 484.

²⁰⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 18, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 26.

²⁰⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 18-19.

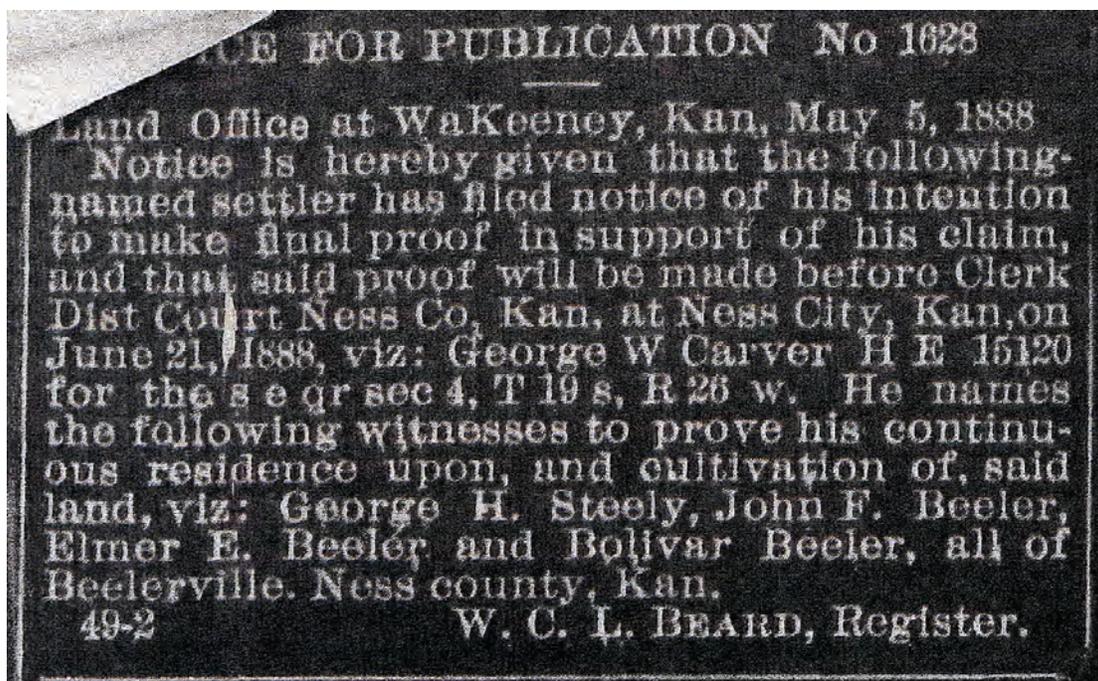


Figure 18. Announcement that George W. Carver was making final proof on his claim, May 12, 1888. *George Washington Carver National Monument.*

Nonetheless, Carver continued the homesteading process and, on October 12, 1886, submitted an affidavit confirming the filing of his homestead application.²¹⁰ He listed his residence as Beelerville, Kansas, and affirmed that he was over twenty-one years of age.²¹¹ Eight days later, he paid a \$14.00 filing fee for his homestead application at the Land Office at WaKeeney, Kansas.²¹² Carver had begun an arduous process, and the legalese on the homestead application made clear his new responsibilities:

It is required of the homestead settler that he shall reside upon and cultivate the land embraced in his homestead entry for a period of five years from the time of filing the affidavit, being also the date of entry. An abandonment of the land for more than six months works a forfeiture of the claim.²¹³

Carver moved onto the property on April 20, 1887, after he finished construction of a small sod house. The building, which measured 14 × 14 feet and was valued at \$50.00, had plastered walls and a board, tar paper, and sod roof.²¹⁴ The house was furnished with his possessions, which included “cookstove and fixtures, bedstead and bed, cupboard, chairs, table, wash tub and round

²¹⁰ Homestead Affidavit, No. 15120, October 20, 1886, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Homestead Application No. 15120, October 20, 1886, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof, Testimony of Witness,” June 21, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives

flat iron.”²¹⁵ Carver was a dedicated homesteader and, by June 1888, utilizing only a spade hoe and corn planter, had broken seventeen acres of land valued at \$50.00, on which he raised ten acres of corn, rice corn, a good garden, and ten hens.²¹⁶ At the same time, Carver planted eight hundred forest trees valued at \$200.00; fifty fruit trees, including mulberries, plums, and apricots, valued at \$25.00; and shrubbery valued at \$10.00.²¹⁷ On June 21, 1888, George H. Steeley testified under oath before N. S. Calhoun, Clerk of District Court of Ness County, Kansas, in support of Carver’s homestead entry. Asked to summarize Carver’s efforts during the previous two years, Steeley stated, “I have seen him most every week, some weeks every day, and know he has acted in good faith under his circumstances.”²¹⁸ Four days later, with the final step of the homestead process now completed, Carver borrowed \$300.00 from George A. Borthwick, utilizing the sod house and land as collateral.²¹⁹ Carver had decided, as some homesteaders did, that rather than waiting five years to receive full title to the land under the Homestead Act of 1862, he would instead buy the 160 acres at \$1.25 per acre. He paid \$200.00 at the receiver’s office at WaKeeney, Kansas, and on December 13, 1889, was issued Certificate No. 9431 from the General Land Office. This was the official transfer of land from the United States of America to George W. Carver.²²⁰

In a final twist of fate that is hard to explain, Carver, now twenty-three, did not remain in Ness County to receive the certificate. Rather, he took the remaining one hundred dollars from the loan and, in his own words, drifted to Winterset, Iowa, taking a job as a cook at the St. Nicholas Hotel.²²¹ The reasons for his departure are baffling, especially considering the effort he applied to improve his homestead. Of course, Carver may have decided to again try his luck at college. Yet he seemed to enjoy the small community he had joined in Ness County. In addition to the Beelers, McKinnis, and Steeley, Carver also befriended members of the African American community, including Bird Gee, a fellow homesteader, and Clara C. Duncan, an art teacher who resided at the Beeler Hotel.²²² Carver and Duncan became close friends, and she apparently provided him with “pointers on art and English prose, and bolstered his confidence.”²²³ Finally, Carver even emerged as a minor celebrity in Ness County when, on March 31, 1888, the local newspaper, the *Ness County News*, profiled him in a small article. The newspaper was very flattering, noting that Carver maintained “a collection of about five hundred plants in a conservatory adjoining the residence of his employer, besides having a large geological collection in and around the place.”²²⁴ Whatever the reason for his leaving, Carver continued to wander in search of an education.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Affidavit Required of Claimant, No. 15120, June 21, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, and “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof.”

²¹⁷ “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof.”

²¹⁸ “Homestead, Pre-Emption and Commutation Proof.”

²¹⁹ Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 26-27.

²²⁰ Receiver’s Office, “Received from George W. Carver \$200,” June 25, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; The United States of America, Certificate No. 9431, December 13, 1889, Homestead Documents, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; and “Care of H.E. No. 15120,” June 25, 1888, Box 006.144, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

²²¹ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver,” and Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

²²² Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 19.

²²³ Dodge, “Carver: Kansas Homesteader,” 25.

²²⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 19.

Chapter Five

HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIFE AS A TEACHER

Between 1890 and November 1896, George W. Carver attended Simpson College and Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm (now Iowa State University), receiving a bachelor of agriculture degree and a master of science in agriculture degree. Carver's success at completing this academic training should not be discounted—it marked the culmination of a twenty-year odyssey in which he overcame significant hardships and barriers. In October 1896, at the personal request of Booker T. Washington, Carver joined the faculty of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University), becoming the head of the newly organized agricultural department. Carver was approximately thirty-one years old. For the next twenty years, through circa 1915, he served as an instructor and teacher, emerging as a popular and inspirational educator at the renowned African American normal and industrial school in Macon County, Alabama. Carver's pedagogy, which emphasized practical knowledge, homespun wisdom, religious sermon, and field trips, became a fixture of the institution. At the same time, Carver maintained a deep and lasting interest in art and painting, his major at Simpson College, and also organized a weekly Bible class for students. Carver's years at the Tuskegee Institute were not without controversy, however, as he was unprepared for larger administrative and managerial duties.

From Winterset, Iowa, to Simpson College

In the late summer or early fall of 1888, George W. Carver left Beeler, Kansas, and traveled approximately 485 miles northeast to Winterset, Iowa. The small community, which was established in the late 1840s and was located approximately thirty-five miles southwest of Des Moines, Iowa, served as the seat of Madison County. Winterset was a predominantly white town in an overwhelmingly white state, having fewer than eleven thousand African Americans out of a total population of almost two million.¹ Carver took a position as first cook, or head cook, at the St. Nicholas Hotel, a three-story building located at the intersection of Jefferson and Second Streets.² He remained at the hotel for several months, writing, circa 1922, that “I cooked at this hotel for some time; then opened a laundry for myself. I ran this laundry for one year.”³ Carver also began attending religious services at the local church, which he later recalled as

¹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2011), 24.

² Herman A. Mueller, ed., *History of Madison County Iowa and Its People* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 368-69; “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd,” Reel 1, Frame 0009, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; and George Washington Carver, “A Brief Sketch of My Life,” ca. 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0012, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

Baptist, and was soon befriended by John and Helen Milholland, a prominent white couple.⁴ Describing their meeting, years later, Carver recalled with great affection that:

One evening I went to a white church, and sat in the rear of the house. The next day a handsome man called for me at the hotel, and said his wife wanted to see me. When I reached the splendid residence I was astonished when she told me that my fine voice had attracted her. I had to sing quite a number of pieces for her, and agree to come to her house at least once a week; and from that time till now Mr. and Mrs. Milholland have been my warmest and most helpful friends.⁵

Carver's relationship with the Milhollands, whom he always referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Milholland, blossomed, and he soon took the habit of reporting his activities to them each day.⁶ Indeed, the Milhollands filled the role of surrogate parents that others had also intermittently played, including the Watkinses in Neosho, the Seymours in Olathe and Minneapolis, and Clara C. Duncan in Beeler.

In some ways, Carver's gravitation to older women, both black and white, became a defining feature of his early life. Of course, some of this was just happenstance—his relationship with Susan Carver was based on the fact that he remained on the Moses Carver farm—while his relationships with Mariah Watkins and Helen Milholland seemed to be genuine and based on mutual affection and warmth. It is also important to avoid taking this psychological interpretation too far. Some Carver biographers, for example, have implied that Carver's attachment to older women was a result of unfulfilled emotional needs because of the disappearance of his parents, particularly his mother, Mary.⁷ Although this may be partially true, Carver demonstrated the ability, again and again, to be entrepreneurial, enterprising, and self-sufficient, with or without the assistance of the white or black community. Another unique personality trait that Carver possessed, and one that began to manifest itself in the early 1890s, was the belief that God had a divine plan for his life. Writing to the Milhollands on April 8, 1890, Carver noted "I am taking better care of myself than I have, I realize that God has a great work for me to do and consequently I must be very careful of my health."⁸ In the years ahead, Carver would increasingly portray his life in terms of a preordained destiny.

By far the most significant contribution of the Milhollands was their forceful insistence that Carver should attend college. Helen, whose husband was a physician, was impressed by Carver's innate painting and singing abilities, two activities for which Carver apparently "had

⁴ George W. Carver to Mr. Mueller, April 5, 1928, GWC Letters, Madison County Historical Society, Winterset, Iowa; see also Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 28.

⁵ Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 26, 49; see also Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 20.

⁸ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 45-46.

passionate fondness.”⁹ Helen suggested, and then ultimately insisted, that Carver attend art school at Simpson College.¹⁰ The institution, which was founded by the United Methodist Church in 1860, was located twenty-five miles east of Winterset, in the small community of Indianola, Iowa. In 1890, the town had two railroads and a population of approximately twenty-four hundred.¹¹ Writing to Helen in September 1901, Carver recalled the importance of her help:

I think of you often and shall never forget what you were to my life, how much real help and inspiration you gave me, you, of course, will never know how much you done for a poor colored boy who was drifting here and there as a ship without a rudder. You helped to steer me aright and what the Lord has in his kindness and wisdom permitted me to accomplish is due in a very great measure to your real genuine Christian spirits.¹²

Carver remained in Winterset, first as a cook and later operating a laundry, from circa 1888 through September 1890. He later explained that it took him approximately one year to save enough money to undertake the journey and to pay for school fees at Simpson College.¹³ The fact that tuition for the 1891–92 school year cost \$12.00 for the fall term, \$10.00 for the winter term, and \$8.25 for the spring term, or the current equivalent of \$201.00 to \$312.00 per semester, speaks to the financial difficulties that Carver still faced in his mid-twenties.¹⁴

George W. Carver entered Simpson College on September 9, 1890.¹⁵ The college, which had seventeen faculty members and approximately three hundred students, was located on a small campus with three buildings.¹⁶ Carver was originally admitted into the preparatory department, possibly because he had not yet officially obtained a high school diploma, and took coursework in grammar, arithmetic, essays, and etymology during the fall, winter, and spring semesters.¹⁷ The biggest hurdle Carver initially faced was finding suitable living quarters in Indianola. Although female undergraduates lived in a dormitory, male students were expected to find housing with local families.¹⁸ Carver, who was the only African American at the school,

⁹ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver in 1897.”

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Catalog of Simpson College 1891–1892,” Folder 154.22.i, Box 22, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers, Collection No. 154, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC (hereafter Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers).

¹² George W. Carver to Dr. and Mrs. Milholland, September 2, 1901, Folder 154.22.i, Box 22, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

¹³ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

¹⁴ Simpson College, “Preparatory School from Catalog 1891–92,” June 19, 1948, 87a-88, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁵ “Statement of Credits of Dr. George W. Carver,” October 18, 1938, File 4: 8/6/1/8-09, General Files, Simpson and Carver, 1890s, Dunn Library, Simpson College, Indianola, IA.

¹⁶ Ed Carty, *George Washington Carver in Indianola: A Tour Guide* (Indianola, IA: Warren County Historical Society, 1990), 10.

¹⁷ “Statement of Credits of Dr. George W. Carver”; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 28.

¹⁸ Rackham Holt, *George Washington Carver: An American Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1943), 63.

received no invitations.¹⁹ To rectify the problem, the college president allowed Carver to set up house in an abandoned shack located one block east of the campus, near W. Detroit Avenue and N. Buxton Street.²⁰ Carver lived in the shack and again established a laundry business. He would later recount that after paying school matriculation fees, he was left with only ten cents, which he used to purchase “5¢ worth of corn meal, and the other 5¢ I spent on beef suet. I lived on these two things a whole week—it took that long for the people to learn that I wanted clothes to wash.”²¹ In another account of the episode, written circa 1897, Carver noted that he lived for a month “on prayer, beef suet, and corn meal, and quite often being without the suet and meal.”²² At the same time, however, Carver took pride in his self-reliance, boasting that he often declined charity and rather preferred to earn his own living.²³ Writing to Raleigh H. Merritt in July 1927, Carver recalled that:

Probably the most unique thing in my entire growing up is that *I would never allow any one to give me money. I wanted to earn my way.* I have been for months without money enough to get a postage stamp, yet would not accept money.²⁴ [italics in the original]

Carver operated the laundry, with its modes of production consisting of a washboard, two tubs, soap, starch, and his labor, throughout the year he spent at Simpson College.²⁵ At the same time, Carver, now approximately twenty-five, befriended members of the white community. He became particularly close to Sophia Liston, the wife of a local bookstore owner.²⁶ Carver was invited into the Liston home, located at 806 N. Howard Street, and often spent afternoons completing his studies in their bay window.²⁷

Carver joined the art department during the winter term of 1891 and took voice and piano classes, in addition to his other coursework, during the spring semester of that same year.²⁸ His art teacher, Etta M. Budd, was initially skeptical of his joining the department, believing, according to an account provided by Mamie E. Lee Shripe, that “a colored student was wasting his time to study art.”²⁹ As a result, Carver entered Budd’s class on a probationary basis, but after a week or two she relented, realizing, as others would later find, that he was a natural artist

¹⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 21.

²⁰ Holt, *Carver: An American Biography*, 63 and Carty, *A Tour Guide*, 9.

²¹ Carver, “A Brief Sketch.”

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ “The Foregoing Is a List of Written Questions Made Up by Raleigh H. Merritt, The Answers to Which Were Made by Dr. George W. Carver in His Own Hand Writing,” July 1927, Reel 1, Frame 0022, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁵ “A Sketch of His Early Life Written By George W. Carver in 1897” and Mrs. Mamie E. Lee Shripe, “Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver,” February 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0624-0626, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

²⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 30.

²⁷ Carty, *A Tour Guide*, 17.

²⁸ “Statement of Credits of Dr. George W. Carver”; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 31.

²⁹ Shripe, “Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver.”

with a “most delicate touch.”³⁰ Carver’s enrollment in the art department proved to be the high-mark of his artistic career—the culmination of the informal drawing and sketching that he had first begun on the Moses Carver farm.³¹ At the same time, his interest in painting intertwined with other important facets of his personality, including his spirituality and love of nature. Writing to an admirer in August 1939, Carver explained that:

I recall when just a boy just starting up to do art work that I longed to paint flowers so that they would speak to the beholder, and inspire and enthuse them to do great things. I have seen people stand and look at pictures (portraits as a rule), and tears would slightly flow down their cheeks. I have wanted my painting of flowers to speak as I stated before to the beholder, and lift their souls beyond the sordid things of life, and give them a glimpse of the creator who shapes and fashions all of our destinations.³²

Budd’s art class, which was held on the third floor of the Scientific and Normal Hall, provided Carver with the technical skills that would later enable him to create the painting known as *Yucca and Cactus*, which represented Iowa at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago.³³ In addition, it is also likely that Budd introduced Carver to the work of other artists, including Rembrandt and Maxfield Parrish, whom he came to admire.³⁴

³⁰ Anna Coxe Toogood, “Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 45, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 22.

³¹ See, for example, Lawrence Elliott, *George Washington Carver: The Man Who Overcame* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 19-20.

³² G. W. Carver to J. J. Lewis, August 15, 1939, Reel 30, Frame 0787, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 38.

³⁴ “Notes on Dr. Carver’s Demonstration to Summer School Teachers,” 1936, Reel 46, Frame 0941-0943, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.



Figure 19. Etta M. Budd’s art class at Simpson College, circa 1892. George W. Carver is center, facing left. *Simpson College Archives*.

Religion also formed an important part of Carver’s life at Simpson College. Although he had joined the Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, Kansas, in 1883, he remained a nondenominational and interracial purveyor of faith. Simpson College, which was affiliated with the United Methodist Church, offered an array of organized and informal religious activities including daily chapel services, noonday prayer meetings, and Bible study. The latter was particularly popular on campus, and Carver apparently enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the Bible with his fellow students.³⁵ He also joined the collegiate chapter of the Young Men’s Christian Association, or YMCA.³⁶ In addition, he was active in the African American religious community in Indianola, attending services at the local African Methodist Church, most likely at the urging of Mahala Williams Battles, a black woman with whom Carver sometimes took meals.³⁷ Carver’s religious participation at Simpson College was well received by his classmates, and the friendly atmosphere of the small community would later lead him to reflect that “the people pushed me along. They made me believe I was a real human being.”³⁸

Simpson College also represented a crossroads for George W. Carver. His ambition, almost since the moment he left the Moses Carver farm, had been to obtain an education—to learn for learning’s sake. Unfortunately, he had put less thought into future employment prospects after achieving this laudable goal. Budd, who had allowed Carver to join the art department, continued to maintain reservations about whether an African American could make

³⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 28, and Carty, *A Tour Guide*, 21.

³⁶ Carty, *A Tour Guide*, 21.

³⁷ “Interview with Frank Plummer,” 98, List of Correspondence, Itinerary on Early Life of Carver 1948, Box 006.132, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee, AL, and “Interview with Miss Etta Budd,” June 16, 1948, 76, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

³⁸ John O. Gross, “President Gross’ Interview with Doctor Carver at Tuskegee,” July 17, 1940, 6, George Washington Carver National Monument Library, Diamond, Missouri (hereafter GWCNM Library).

ends meet as an artist in “the racial climate of the time.”³⁹ Although the exact sequence of events is not known, it appears that upon learning of Carver’s interest in plants and flowers, Budd (whose father, Joseph L. Budd, was a professor of horticulture at Iowa Agricultural College in Ames, Iowa) counseled him to switch majors and instead study agriculture.⁴⁰ Budd, who was white, presented the choice in a racial context: even though a career as an artist might be unobtainable, Carver could select a new path, one that would benefit his fellow African Americans. Describing the episode in July 1940, Carver noted, “Miss Budd advised me to take up agriculture in order to render a greater service to my people.”⁴¹ Carver’s decision to leave Simpson College in July 1891, at the age of twenty-six, and pursue the study of agriculture was not taken lightly and ultimately proved to be the major turning point in his life.

Interestingly, Carver’s decision to take up the cause, so to speak, and select an occupation that could potentially benefit others in the black community was a departure from his previous actions. Although Carver had certainly suffered discrimination and prejudice during his travels through Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa, no evidence has been found indicating that he was consumed by the issue of racial injustice—the race question, as he would later describe it—before his interaction with Budd in 1891.⁴² In many ways, Carver succeeded in his goal of obtaining an education because he was not troublesome—he operated within the accepted rules of the South. Finally, Carver’s decision to study agriculture may have occurred in concert with another event that further confirmed the need to obtain financial security. In 1891, Carver lost his 160-acre property in Ness County, Kansas, after he defaulted on his loan payments to Fred Borthwick, the new creditor.⁴³

Undergraduate Studies at Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm

George W. Carver transferred to Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm (later Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, now Iowa State University) during the early summer of 1891 and began coursework as a second-term freshman in mid-July.⁴⁴ The institution, which was known as Iowa Agricultural College, or IAC by its students, was established in March 1858 and was located in Ames, Iowa, approximately fifty miles north of Indianola, Iowa.⁴⁵ Iowa Agricultural College, which began as a land grant institution, that is, funded in part by the Morrill Land-Grant College Act (1862) and Second Morrill Land-Grant College Act (1890), sought to “democratize” higher education and emphasized the teaching of practical subjects including agriculture and the mechanical arts.⁴⁶ Unlike his coursework at Simpson College, which was quite provincial, Carver undertook a rigorous course of study at

³⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 22.

⁴⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 31.

⁴¹ Gross, “Interview with Doctor Carver,” 3.

⁴² G. W. Carver to Creed Quinn, Jr., December 3, 1938, Reel 26, Frame 0932, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 27.

⁴⁴ Toogood, “Historic Resource Study,” 45.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Iowa State Agricultural College and Farm for the Year 1863*, February 1, 1864, 2-3, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Ames, IA (hereafter Iowa State University).

⁴⁶ Esther Singleton Powell, “Simon Green Atkins and the Development of Higher Education Opportunities for African Americans in the North Carolina Piedmont” (PhD diss., Northcentral University, 2008), 14.

Iowa Agricultural College, including classes in bacteriology, zoology, vegetable pathology, botany, and agricultural chemistry.⁴⁷ Carver had joined, quite by accident, a leading center of agricultural science, what historian Mark D. Hersey later described as “a rich scientific milieu.”⁴⁸ Carver’s achievement is even more noteworthy because he entered the institution at a time when few white people—and even fewer African Americans—had access to higher education. His experience was decidedly atypical in the 1890s and once again spoke to his unique set of abilities.

Carver was the first African American to attend Iowa Agricultural College.⁴⁹ Although Iowa had a few towns, such as Buxton, that welcomed black residents during the 1890s, the state’s African American population was less than 1 percent of the state’s residents.⁵⁰ The black population in Des Moines, located thirty-five miles south of Ames, totaled a mere 517 in 1895.⁵¹ Carver’s initial welcome into the college community was discouraging. During his first day of classes, a group of male students shouted racial insults at him, and the dining hall manager made him take his meals in the basement with the “hired help” rather than allowing him to join other students in the dining hall.⁵² This was despite the fact that Iowa had granted African Americans “full and equal enjoyment” of inns, barber shops, public conveyances, and places of amusement with the passage of the 1884 Civil Rights Act, with restaurants, lunch counters, and bathhouses added to the list in 1892.⁵³ Believing he had made a serious mistake in transferring to Iowa Agricultural College, Carver contacted Sophia Liston in Indianola to request her advice. In an act of kindness that would forever be remembered by Carver, Liston immediately put on “her best dress and hat” and took the train to Ames.⁵⁴ There, Liston ate with Carver in the basement of the dining hall and toured the campus with him in a show of support. As a result, according to Carver, “the next day everything was different, the ice was broken, and from then on, things went very much easier.”⁵⁵

Carver also had difficulty finding suitable lodging on the campus, recalling in May 1922 that “being a colored boy, and the crowded conditions of the school, made it rather embarrassing

⁴⁷ “Transcript of the Record of Carver, George Washington,” April 11, 1974, File 8-6-1-8-11, General Files, Carver and Iowa State, Dunn Library, Simpson College, Indianola, IA.

⁴⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, x, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 32.

⁴⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 28, 44. A second African American student, P. C. Parks, graduated from Iowa Agricultural College in 1904. In June 1910, W. E. B. Du Bois communicated with A. B. Storms, the university president, about the school’s admission of African Americans. Storms reported that “Negro students are entirely welcome in this institution. They have no discourtesy whatever shown them by fellow students or others.” Storms did advise, however, that “[i]t was not always easy for a Negro student to find rooming and boarding accommodations except where there are enough to room and board together.” See A. B. Storms to W. E. B. Du Bois, June 27, 1910, AH-5, Special Collections, University Archives, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

⁵⁰ Leola Nelson Bergmann, “The Negro in Iowa,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, February 1969, 34, and Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 24.

⁵¹ Bergmann, “The Negro in Iowa,” 47.

⁵² Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 28; McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 33; and Lucy Cherry Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, Folder 154.16.f, Box 16, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

⁵³ Bergmann, “The Negro in Iowa,” 54.

⁵⁴ Crisp, *George Washington Carver*.

⁵⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 33.

for some, and it made the question of a room rather puzzling.”⁵⁶ After several attempts to find local housing failed, James Wilson, the director of the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station, allowed Carver to stay in an empty office in one of the campus buildings.⁵⁷ In exchange for the room, Carver served as a caretaker and part-time janitor for the agricultural department.⁵⁸ He undertook numerous other menial jobs to pay for his tuition and living expenses during the three and one-half years he worked to complete his bachelor of agriculture degree at the school. He would later recall that he took “odd jobs of all kinds for a number of the professors; such as cutting wood; making gardens; working in the fields; helping clean house; taking care of the green house and the chemical, botanical and bacteriological laboratories.”⁵⁹ Carver also worked in the campus dining hall, served as a barber for fellow students, and even leased a small storage space in the basement of one of the buildings for “students’ belongings which they wished to store during vacations.”⁶⁰

During his freshman year, which ended on November 11, 1891, Carver completed sixteen classes, including advanced algebra, elocution, history, drawing, elementary botany, rhetoric, and economic entomology.⁶¹ The following year, he commenced his specialization in agriculture and completed eleven courses, including horticulture, botany (systematic and cryptogamic), zoology, general chemistry, and practical agriculture.⁶² In 1893, his junior year, Carver continued the agriculture concentration, completing coursework in bacteriology, agriculture chemistry, principles of heredity, applied botany, vegetable pathology, dairying, and laws of business. In addition, Carver also took classes in trigonometry, surveying, and oration.⁶³ In 1894, his senior year, Carver continued coursework in agricultural chemistry and horticulture and also took classes on farm drainage, bacteriology of milk, seeds and grasses, and animal and vegetable nutrition.⁶⁴ Carver seemed to have preferred the botany and horticulture classes best, and H. C. Taylor, who was a friend at Ames, recalled that “he had a hard time with his mathematics, but seemed to get along very well indeed in botany.”⁶⁵ Nonetheless, Carver

⁵⁶ Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0016, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, and “Interview with Judge C. G. Lee,” June 16, 1948, 74, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

⁵⁹ Geo. W. Carver, Research and Experiment Station, to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, Reel 1, Frame 0015, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶⁰ Shripe, “Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver,” and Joseph A. Moore to Jessie P. Guzman, March 14, 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0644-0645, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶¹ “Transcript of the Record of Carver.”

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ H. C. Taylor to Mr. Jump, July 28, 1923, Reel 48, Frame 0623, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 33-34.

maintained a respectable academic record at Iowa Agricultural College, achieving, by rough estimate, an unofficial grade point average (GPA) of 3.74 in his undergraduate degree program.⁶⁶



Figure 20. Members of the creamery operations class at Iowa Agricultural College, circa 1894. Carver is in the last row, second from the right. *Special Collections Department / Iowa State University Library.*

Carver interacted closely with faculty members at Iowa Agricultural College. During his undergraduate studies, he worked with Joseph L. Budd, the father of his former art teacher. Budd, who had trained at Union College in Schenectady, New York, was a noted horticulturist. Carver learned specialized skills, including how to bud and graft plants, propagate flowers, and prune trees.⁶⁷ He also interacted with other prominent agriculturists at the college, including Louis H. Pammel, James Wilson, and Henry C. Wallace; the latter two would go on to serve as U.S. Secretaries of Agriculture.⁶⁸ Working together, these instructors provided new

⁶⁶ George W. Carver's transcript from Iowa Agriculture College did not include a cumulative grade point average. The 3.74 average was reached by calculating the total grade points he received (194.65) and dividing this by the total number of classes (52) that he took. See "Transcript of the Record of Carver."

⁶⁷ Shripe, "Instances in the Life of George Washington Carver."

⁶⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 29-32. James Wilson served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for sixteen consecutive years, from 1897 through 1913, under Presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Howard Taft. Henry C. Wallace served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from 1921 to 1924 under President Warren G. Harding.

opportunities to the burgeoning scholar. In 1893, for example, Carver was asked to present a paper, titled “Grafting the Cacti,” to the Iowa State Horticultural Society.⁶⁹ The address was later published in the society’s annual report, becoming Carver’s first scientific paper.⁷⁰ Carver’s undergraduate thesis, “Plants as Modified by Man,” examined the benefits of hybridization through careful selection, cross-fertilization, and cultivation. Carver described the current state-of-the-art hybridization research, providing examples of how plants, including *Rosa rogusa*, a rose native to eastern Asia; the geranium; the amaryllis; and the calla lily, could be “adapted to the soil and climate of the whole north and northwest which we are sadly in need of.”⁷¹ He concluded that “from now henceforth man was not simply to assist nature in producing endless varieties, but be the actual progenitor of new creations.”⁷² It was an extremely sophisticated insight for the twenty-nine-year-old student. Carver also found himself interacting with a future vice president of the United States. Wallace’s son, Henry A. Wallace, who was born on October 7, 1888, became quite fond of Carver and would often join him on walks to collect botany samples. As an adult, Wallace served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (1933–40) and later became the thirty-third vice president (1941–45), under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.⁷³ Wallace and Carver remained close friends during their lifetimes, and Wallace later became an important champion of Carver when he moved to the Tuskegee Institute.

Carver was also active in an array of student activities at Iowa Agricultural College. He was a member of the Art Club, German Club, and Welch Eclectic Society.⁷⁴ The latter group, named after Dr. A. S. Welch, the first president of the college, was established in May 1888 and developed science, literature, and public speaking skills among its members. Carver wrote poetry as a society member and “often entertained by singing, playing musical instruments, and reading aloud.”⁷⁵ He also enjoyed military drill, a bi-weekly requirement for all male students during their freshman and sophomore years. After Carver completed his obligatory two-year service, he continued the activity and ultimately reached the rank of Quartermaster during his senior year.⁷⁶ Joseph A. Moore, a classmate of Carver in Ames, described him as “a tall, spare, bald . . . [student who] was genial, unassuming and always welcome in any group or class with which he might be thrown in contact.”⁷⁷ Carver also served as a masseur for the college football team, a responsibility that had him giving massages and rubdowns to players who had “cramped and sore muscles.”⁷⁸ Finally, he also took on the assignment of writing the class poem and

⁶⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 42.

⁷¹ George Washington Carver, “Plants as Modified by Man,” *Iowa State Journal of Research* 55, no. 3 (February 1981): 209-17, Folder Publications by Carver – B.S. Thesis 1894, Box 2, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 40-41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁵ Iowa Agricultural College, *History and Reminiscences of I.A.C.*, 1897, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, *The Bomb*, 1894, 63-64, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; and Toby Fishbein, “George Washington Carver,” April 1976, 1-2, Folder Biographical, 1895-2006, Box 1, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University.

⁷⁶ *The Bomb*, 101-3.

⁷⁷ Joseph A. Moore to Jessie P. Guzman, March 14, 1949, Reel 58, Frame 0644-0645, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁷⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 29.

drawing the class picture for graduation.⁷⁹ At the same time, however, Carver, as noted by biographers Linda O. McMurry and Mark D. Hersey, was something of an eccentric student, with habits that included sunrise walks in the woods, making his own clothes, gathering wild mushrooms for meals, and wearing a flower in his lapel, which, taken together, differentiated him from other members of the student body.⁸⁰

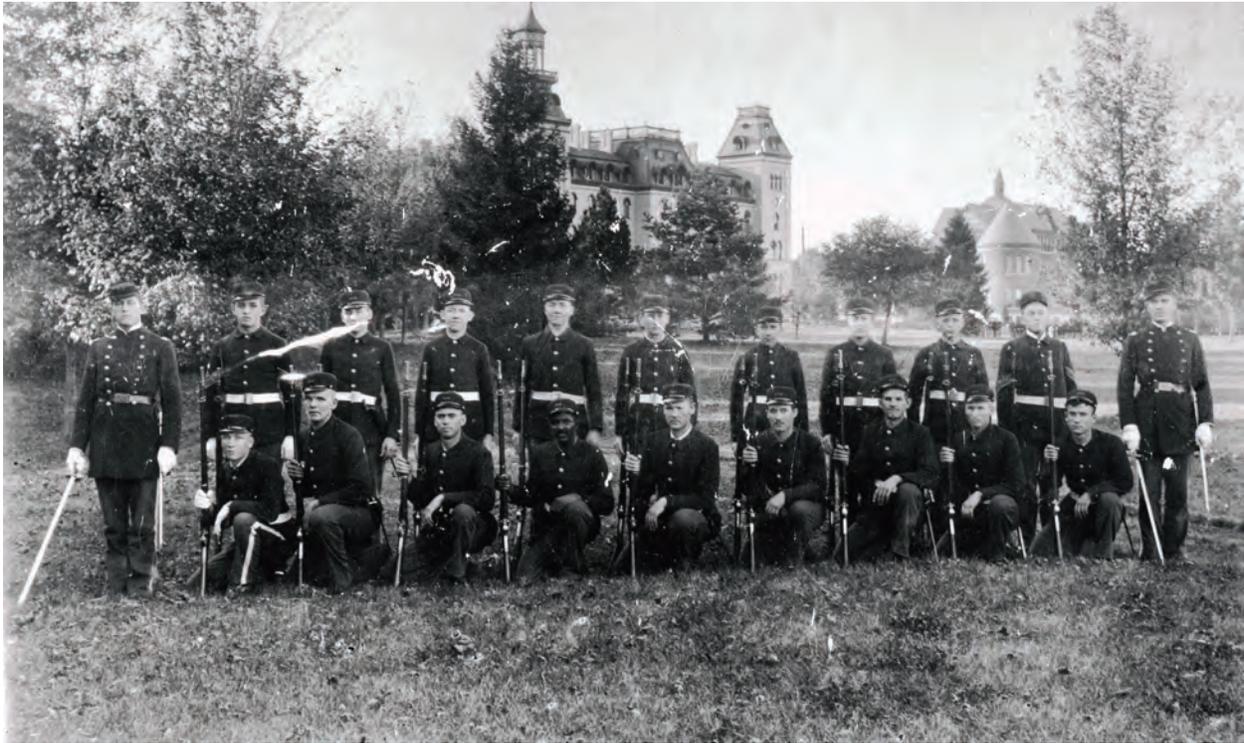


Figure 21. George W. Carver participating in military drill at Iowa Agricultural College, circa 1893. Carver is in the first row, fourth from the left. *Special Collections Department / Iowa State University Library.*

Religion also continued to be an important part of Carver's life, providing him with inner strength and linking him to the broader Christian community. Carver, like other people of faith, continued to turn to the Bible during periods of apprehension or anxiety. After arriving on the Ames campus in 1891 and finding himself initially rebuffed by other students, he wrote the Milhollands that he missed Simpson College but with "the Lord helping me I will do the best I can."⁸¹ We can also extrapolate that Carver probably took comfort in his favorite Bible passage, Proverbs 3:6: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."⁸² As a public institution, Iowa Agricultural College, unlike Simpson College, was nondenominational and had no formal affiliation with any religious group. Nonetheless, shortly after he arrived, Carver joined a small prayer group that met on campus.⁸³ He soon realized that James Wilson, the new director of the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station and former member of the U.S. House of

⁷⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 35.

⁸⁰ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 29, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 37.

⁸¹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 28.

⁸² G. W. Carver to Isabelle Coleman, July 24, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1264-1265, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 34.

Representatives, was also a devout Christian.⁸⁴ Within a few months, Carver's prayer group began meeting in Wilson's office, becoming a popular event on the campus each Wednesday evening.⁸⁵ Carver and Wilson, who was born in Scotland, became close friends and confidants and even worked together to orient newly arriving Christian students each term.⁸⁶ Carver later wrote that "the name of Hon. James Wilson is sacred to me. He was one of the finest teachers that it has ever been my privilege to listen to. He taught a Sunday School class in which every student would have enrolled, if they had been allowed."⁸⁷ Carver also became active again in the collegiate chapter of the YMCA.⁸⁸ During his junior and senior years, he attended the YMCA National Students' Summer School at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, as a representative of Iowa Agricultural College. Although Carver was the only black delegate, he was, for the most part, well received within the summer school and even organized several short botany hikes for other students.⁸⁹ Carver certainly had evangelical zeal, and his graduation yearbook later described him as an "earnest and conscientious Christian worker."⁹⁰ He may have also entertained the idea of attending the Chicago Evangelization Society (now Moody Bible Institute) in Chicago, Illinois. Founded in 1886 by Dwight Lyman Moody, the school trained evangelical ministers and missionaries in the Revivalist tradition.⁹¹ Carver informed the Milhollands that he was saving to attend classes, and McMurry asserted that Carver and another student "dreamed of becoming a missionary to Africa."⁹²

Throughout his time at Iowa Agricultural College, Carver also maintained his interest in art and continued to paint. He returned to Simpson College in December 1891, during the winter break after his freshman year, to take another art class with Etta Budd.⁹³ Budd later recalled that Carver "painted at Ames all the time."⁹⁴ In December 1892, following his sophomore year, four of his paintings were exhibited at the Cedar Rapids Art Exhibit, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Although Carver had planned not to attend the exhibit because of the expense involved, several classmates and professors, including Joseph Budd, Wilson, and Pammel, surprised Carver with a train ticket to Cedar Rapids and a set of new clothes.⁹⁵ His painting *Yucca and Cactus*, which was based on desert vegetation he had seen while homesteading in western Kansas, was

⁸⁴ Ibid., and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 32.

⁸⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 34.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ George W. Carver to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, 2, Folder Correspondence, Carver-Pammel (1918-1924), Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University.

⁸⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 34.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 34-35; George W. Carver to My Dear Friends the Milhollands, October 15, 1894, 1, Folder 154.3.b (1890-1928), Box 3, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers; Crisp, *George Washington Carver*; Dorothy Kehlenbeck, "Dr. George Washington Carver," 2, Folder Biographical 1895-2006, Box 1, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University.

⁹⁰ Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, *The Bomb*, 55.

⁹¹ George W. Carver to My Dear Friends the Milhollands, October 15, 1894, 1-2, Folder 154.3.b (1890-1928), Box 3, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

⁹² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 44.

⁹³ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 28-29.

⁹⁴ "Interview with Etta Budd," June 16, 1948, 76, Folder Interview, Notes, Etc., Box 006.100, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

⁹⁵ Toby Fishbein, "Interview with Austin W. Curtis," March 3, 1979, 16, Folder Oral History Interview – Austin W. Curtis 1979, Box 2, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University; George W. Carver to My Dear Friends the Milhollands, October 15, 1894, 1-2, Folder 154.3.b (1890-1928), Box 3, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers; and Kehlenbeck, "Dr. George Washington Carver," 2.

ultimately selected to represent Iowa at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and won an honorable mention.⁹⁶ The positive reception the painting received may have caused Carver to briefly reconsider his decision to study agriculture.⁹⁷ In October 1894, shortly before he was awarded his undergraduate degree, he informed the Milhollands that he was planning to take a course at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts (now School of the Art Institute of Chicago) before he started a master's degree program at Iowa Agricultural College.⁹⁸ Although he never made it to the institution, he retained a painter's appreciation of color, composition, and arrangement throughout the remainder of his life. Indeed, Carver was captivated by the variety of colors that appeared in nature, and his laboratory observations were often recorded in artistic rather than scientific language. Describing an experiment in April 1926, Carver noted that:

I count fifty-two opening buds and blossoms of the glorious amaryllis (lilies) of my own breeding, ranging in color from almost white to flame colored scarlet, some marbled and penciled in almost an unbelievable way.⁹⁹

In later years, his use of artistic and flowery language led critics to misjudge his formal training.¹⁰⁰ Although Carver enjoyed art and painting, he was ultimately an agriculturist. On November 14, 1894, almost eighteen years after he left the Moses Carver farm in search of his education, George W. Carver received a bachelor of agriculture degree from Iowa Agricultural College.¹⁰¹ He was approximately twenty-nine years old.

⁹⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 38.

⁹⁷ George Washington Carver, "1897 or Thereabouts – George Washington Carver's Own Brief History of His Life," Folder 1, Box 1, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University.

⁹⁸ George W. Carver to My Dear Friends the Milhollands, October 15, 1894, 1-2, Folder 154.3.b (1890-1928), Box 3, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers.

⁹⁹ G. W. Carver to My Beloved Friends, April 27, 1926, Reel 9, Frame 0916, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 152.

¹⁰¹ "Transcript of the Record of Carver."



Figure 22. George W. Carver upon graduation from Iowa Agricultural College, circa 1894. *Special Collections Department / Iowa State University Library.*

Graduate Training at Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm

After graduation, Carver was invited to remain at Iowa Agricultural College for graduate school, pursuing a master of science in agriculture degree between November 14, 1894, and November 10, 1896.¹⁰² By this time, he was no longer living on campus; instead, he had taken a room in the home of Eliza Owens, a widow who was an instructor on campus.¹⁰³ Carver was also one of eight graduates of the class of 1894 hired by the college as teaching assistants, and one of three graduates retained by the botanical department in 1895.¹⁰⁴ Carver's formal position, Assistant in Botany, meant that he was responsible for subordinate teaching duties and also "given charge of the greenhouse, bacteriological laboratory, and the laboratory work in systematic biology."¹⁰⁵ Carver utilized the skills he had learned as an undergraduate, including grafting, budding, cross-fertilization, and pollination biology, to assist faculty members in their research projects.¹⁰⁶ He also entered the classroom as a teacher for the first time—instructing biology to freshman students. Carver enjoyed and ultimately excelled at this role. McMurry reported that one former student "declared that Carver was his best teacher and displayed an unusual gift for guiding students to discover things for themselves."¹⁰⁷

As a graduate student, Carver worked under Louis H. Pammel, specializing in plant pathology, the study of plant diseases, and mycology, the study of fungi. Pammel graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1885 and worked at the Shaw School of Botany at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, from 1885 to 1887. Arriving at Iowa Agricultural College in February 1889, he was a prominent botanist who also introduced a class in landscape architecture.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Carver's graduate program included coursework in agricultural subjects, such as livestock, horticulture, botany, agricultural chemistry, zoology, and practical agriculture, as well as topics outside his area of specialization, including algebra, history, military, laws of business, and elocution.¹⁰⁹ Carver took special interest in the collection and classification of fungi and other plant pathogens, including bacteria and viruses.¹¹⁰ As part of his graduate training, he collected and introduced around fifteen hundred specimens, many unique and quite rare, into Iowa's herbarium collection.¹¹¹ Pammel wrote that Carver "was the most wonderful collector I ever have known, and much interested in collecting fungi, among other things."¹¹² Pammel, in addition to being Carver's graduate advisor and mentor, became a good

¹⁰² Ibid.; see also Carver, "A Brief Sketch."

¹⁰³ Iowa State Department of History and Archives, "Census Record of the Family of Eliza Owens," February 21, 1957, 830, Folder Biographical – Census Record, 1895, Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 43-44.

¹⁰⁴ Iowa Agricultural College, *History and Reminiscences*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ G. W. Carver to Mr. Griffith, July 3, 1916, Reel 5, Frame 0663, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; see also Toogood, "Historic Resource Study," 45.

¹⁰⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁸ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 37; Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 34-40; and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 39-40; see also <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~isu150/history/pammel.html>.

¹⁰⁹ "Transcript of the Record of Carver."

¹¹⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 39-40.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 40.

¹¹² Crisp, *George Washington Carver*, V-15.

friend, and the two corresponded frequently between 1897 and 1928.¹¹³ Pammel even visited Carver at the Tuskegee Institute on several occasions during the 1920s, including one visit, in March 1928, that Carver characterized as a “delightful dream.”¹¹⁴ In April 1918, Carver wrote to Pammel that it was “a distinct honor to have been a pupil of yours, and as I have said to you a few times and to others many times, you influenced my life possibly more than anyone else, for which I am far more grateful than my words can express.”¹¹⁵



Figure 23. L. H. Pammel, Augusta Pammel, Robert R. Moton, and George W. Carver at the Tuskegee Institute, March 1928. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

Carver also had the opportunity to continue writing scientific papers. In his first year as a graduate student, he coauthored two articles on mycology with Pammel. One article, “Treatment of Currants and Cherries to Prevent Spot Diseases,” focused on the use of a copper-sulphate-based fungicide known as Bordeaux mixture, while the other article, “Fungus Diseases of Plants at Ames, Iowa, 1895,” detailed parasitic fungi found in Ames.¹¹⁶ In addition, Carver published two articles in the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station bulletin, one describing the cultivation of ferns in the north and northwest, and the other providing advice on window gardens. He also coauthored a short article on red cedar rust with F. C. Stewart, a mycologist at the New York

¹¹³ “Inventory of George W. Carver’s Correspondence with L. H. Pammel,” Folder Inventory List – Correspondence, Carver Pammel n.d., Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University.

¹¹⁴ G. W. Carver to Dr. Pammel, March 23, 1928, Reel 10, Frame 1158, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁵ George W. Carver to Dr. L. H. Pammel, April 29, 1918, 1, Folder Correspondence, Carver-Pammel (1918-1924), Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University.

¹¹⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 40, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 44-45.

State Experiment Station.¹¹⁷ These publications often led to speaking engagements, and in March 1896, Carver was asked to present a lecture on flora culture in Mediapolis, Iowa, located about two hundred miles southeast of Ames.¹¹⁸ Carver completed his graduate program in November 1896, at the approximate age of thirty-one.¹¹⁹ According to Hersey, he was, at that time, “the only African American then holding an advanced degree in agricultural science.”¹²⁰ Iowa Agricultural College, its faculty, and the college community had been very supportive of Carver during his five years at the institution. Writing to Pammel in May 1922, Carver recalled his time at the college: “I have no words to adequately express my impressions of dear old I.A.C. All I am and all I hope to be, I owe in very large measure to this blessed institution.”¹²¹

Teaching at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute

Before receiving his master of science in agriculture degree, George W. Carver had already begun to think about post-graduation opportunities. As a well-liked and -respected teaching assistant, Carver was encouraged to continue his career at Iowa Agricultural College. Shortly after completing his graduate training, in late 1896, he was appointed a member of the faculty at the college, becoming in essence an adjunct instructor.¹²² Concurrent with this, and possibly at the urging of Pammel, Carver also considered the possibility of pursuing a doctorate degree in mycology.¹²³ To this end, he may have contacted the Shaw School of Botany at Washington University, where Pammel had previously worked, although the extent of these communications is not known. In November 1895, Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Alcorn State University) offered Carver a faculty position. The institution, which was established in 1871 and was the first black land-grant college, occupied a 1,700-acre campus in Lorman, Mississippi. Carver politely declined the offer, mainly because he had not yet finished his graduate program, but it was also clear that Iowa Agricultural College was hoping that he would stay in Ames upon completion of his studies. William M. Beardshear, the president of Iowa Agricultural College, responded to the offer on Carver’s behalf, stating that “we would not care to have him change unless he can better himself.”¹²⁴

Carver received another employment offer on March 28, 1896, when Booker T. Washington, the president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Macon County, Alabama, inquired about whether he would be interested in becoming head of the school’s new agricultural department.¹²⁵ In presenting the opportunity to Carver, Washington wrote, “You perhaps know that at present all of our teachers are of the colored race. Now we very much prefer to have a colored man in charge of this new department

¹¹⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 39.

¹¹⁸ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 36.

¹¹⁹ “Biographical Sketch,” undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁰ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 1.

¹²¹ George W. Carver to Dr. Pammel, May 5, 1922, 2, Folder Correspondence, Carver-Pammel (1918-1924), Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Iowa State University.

¹²² “Biographical Sketch,” undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 55-56.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43; William J. Federer, *George Washington Carver: His Life & Faith in His Own Words* (St. Louis: Amerisearch Inc., 2008), 31; and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 45.

and feel that you are the man for the work.”¹²⁶ Writing about the episode in July 1927, Carver informed biographer Raleigh H. Merritt that he also traveled to Cedar Rapids to meet with Washington during the job negotiations.¹²⁷ Carver stated, “I went to Cedar Rapids Iowa to meet him. He gave a lecture there and sent for me. He knew I was there by writing to [the] college president—inquiries about colored students.”¹²⁸ Interestingly, Carver was initially undecided about joining the Tuskegee Institute, informing Washington on April 3, 1896, that he first wanted to finish his master’s degree and was also considering an offer from Alcorn A&M in Mississippi.¹²⁹ By April 12, 1896, however, Carver had changed his mind, requesting catalogs and other information from Washington and adding, “If you are prepared to make me an offer now it shall receive my first consideration.”¹³⁰ Carver also told Washington about his ambition to help the African American community, famously stating:

Of course it has always been the one great ideal of my life to be of the greatest good to the greatest number of “my people” possible and to this end I have been preparing myself for these many years, feeling as I do that this line of education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom to our people.¹³¹

Washington was no doubt impressed, and five days later he formally offered Carver the department head position at a salary of \$1,000 per year and board, including all expenses except travel.¹³² Washington pledged that the new agricultural department would be “the best equipped and only distinct agricultural school in the South for the benefit of the colored people.”¹³³

When Carver arrived at the Tuskegee Institute, he joined a unique educational institution that was the creation of one individual—Booker T. Washington. In many ways, Washington’s childhood mirrored Carver’s own. Washington was born enslaved on April 5, 1856, on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia.¹³⁴ Like Carver, he never knew the precise day or year of his birth, and he never met his father. After the Civil War, Washington moved to Malden, West Virginia, learning to read, like Carver, from Noah Webster’s *Elementary Spelling Book*, the

¹²⁶ Booker T. Washington to George W. Carver, April 17, 1896, 1, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹²⁷ Carver and Washington originally planned to meet in Waterloo, Iowa. See Carver letter to B. T. Washington, June 21, 1896, GWCNM Library.

¹²⁸ “The Foregoing Is a List of Written Questions Made Up by Raleigh H. Merritt, The Answers to Which Were Made by Dr. George W. Carver in His Own Hand Writing,” July 1927, Reel 1, Frame 0023, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²⁹ George W. Carver to Booker T. Washington, April 3, 1896, 1, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 43.

¹³⁰ George W. Carver to Booker T. Washington, April 12, 1896, 1, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Booker T. Washington to George W. Carver, April 17, 1896, 2, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁴ Raymond Wolters, “Washington, Booker Taliaferro,” in *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 1152.

blue-back speller. Washington also yearned to educate himself. Although working in a salt furnace and coal mine and as a houseboy, he was able to intermittently attend school. In 1872, he enrolled in the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University) in Hampton, Virginia, making the five-hundred-mile journey “by walking, begging rides both in wagons and in the cars.”¹³⁵ After graduating from the Hampton Institute in 1875, Washington worked in a hotel and then spent two years teaching at an African American school near Malden, West Virginia. He then briefly attended college at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the American Baptist Home Mission Society, returning to the Hampton Institute to teach. When the Alabama State Legislature passed legislation in 1880 to establish an African American school in Macon County, a result of lobbying by two men, Lewis Adams and George W. Campbell, the first formerly enslaved and the latter a former slave owner, Washington was recommended as the new school principal.¹³⁶

Washington established the Tuskegee Institute on July 4, 1881. His first challenge was finding a suitable location to hold classes. In abstruse fashion, the Alabama legislature had appropriated only \$2,000 to the institution to pay for teachers’ salaries and made no provision for purchasing land or obtaining school buildings.¹³⁷ Undeterred, Washington taught the first thirty students in a “rather dilapidated shanty” borrowed from Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, the local Methodist church.¹³⁸ Shortly thereafter, he found a more suitable location for the school, a hundred-acre abandoned plantation known as Burnt Farm. By November 1881, the school had grown to include eighty students. As a normal and industrial school serving students of varying abilities and aptitudes, the Tuskegee Institute was both a high school and vocational school.¹³⁹ The Tuskegee Institute modeled its coursework after the Hampton Institute and provided African American students with an industrial education that included practical, hands-on learning.¹⁴⁰ In addition to attending classes, students were expected to help renovate buildings, clear land, and cultivate crops and received training in bricklaying, carpentry, and sewing. For Washington and other faculty at the school, hard work and labor were something to be emphasized. At the same time, Washington believed that the race problem could be solved by economic progress rather than political and social protest.¹⁴¹ In a speech given to the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, in September 1895, Washington argued “that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly.”¹⁴² Although controversial among African Americans, Washington’s view, known as the Atlanta Compromise, was embraced by many in both the black and white communities, bringing acclaim, recognition, and numerous philanthropic donations to the school.¹⁴³

¹³⁵ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1901), 48.

¹³⁶ B. D. Mayberry, *A Century of Agriculture in the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University – 1890-1990* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 6-7.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 110.

¹³⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 45.

¹⁴⁰ Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Page & Company, 1911), 113; Mayberry, *A Century of Agriculture*, 62-63; and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 76.

¹⁴¹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 75.

¹⁴² Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 3 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583-87.

¹⁴³ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 254-76.

Carver arrived at the Tuskegee Institute, located in Macon County, Alabama, approximately 950 miles southeast of Ames, Iowa, and forty miles east of Montgomery, Alabama, on October 8, 1896.¹⁴⁴ Shortly before departing for the new position, which had been funded by the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen, Carver received several gifts from friends and colleagues at Iowa Agricultural College, including a new microscope.¹⁴⁵ The event was even reported in the college annual, the student editors noting that Carver was going “to take up life’s work in a broader field. He has been elected to the chair of agriculture in the great industrial school at Tuskegee, Alabama, of which Booker T. Washington is president.”¹⁴⁶ These accolades, however, also reinforced a negative character trait that became more pronounced as Carver aged. Having spent almost twenty years obtaining an education in the face of numerous hardships, he sometimes came across as conceited, haughty, and even arrogant.¹⁴⁷ In addition, his strong religious faith and corresponding missionary zeal led him to believe that his arrival at the Tuskegee Institute was part of God’s divine plan.¹⁴⁸ As McMurry astutely observed, “With God behind him and Washington begging him to come, Carver believed himself a very special faculty member.”¹⁴⁹

At the same time, the teaching staff at the Tuskegee Institute were suspicious of their new brethren, who had no prior experience in the Deep South or with the unique social mores it engendered.¹⁵⁰ Carver’s interest in plant pathology and mycology was interesting but of little practical value at an institution whose primary focus was industrial and vocational training.¹⁵¹ Carver was not hired as a scientist or a researcher but rather as an educator, and it would take him time to appreciate the difference.¹⁵² In many ways, he found himself in the age-old debate about the value of an education—that is, whether learning should be undertaken for learning’s sake or whether it needed to ultimately serve some practical purpose. Washington, and most faculty at the Tuskegee Institute, strongly believed the latter and shunned the esoteric pursuits of the ivory tower.¹⁵³ In addition, and to further add insult to injury, Carver alienated himself by continuing to speak of his desire to again take up painting. Writing to the school’s finance committee less than a month after arriving, Carver stated:

You doubtless know that I came here for the benefit of my people, no other motive in view. Moreover I do not expect to teach many years, but will quit as soon as I can trust my work to others, and engage my brush work, which will be of great honor to our people showing what we may attain, along, science, history, literature and art.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁴ “Biographical Sketch,” undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁵ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 47.

¹⁴⁶ Iowa Agricultural College, *History and Reminiscences*.

¹⁴⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 45-46.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 45, 304.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 45, 52.

¹⁵⁴ George W. Carver to Finance Committee, November 11, 1896, 1, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

Whether Carver seriously intended to abandon agriculture for painting is not known, but whatever the case, it was an inconsiderate remark that cost him support and prestige among his new colleagues. Although Carver had expected a warm welcome in Alabama, his reception was ultimately muted and possibly even met with resentment.¹⁵⁵

Carver's early years at the Tuskegee Institute were further clouded by the realization that he was unprepared for the administrative and managerial duties his new position required. Although he was extremely self-sufficient and even entrepreneurial, as represented by his ability to set up a laundry business and find work in almost every town he lived in, he was ill-equipped as a manager and administrator.¹⁵⁶ Carver, who was not detail oriented and was unable to delegate, quickly found himself out of his depth as a department head.¹⁵⁷ In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he was expected to organize the new department and determine the requirements for the first agricultural building.¹⁵⁸ He was also tasked with managing the school's agricultural activities, which included two large school farms—the 700-acre campus farm and the 800-acre Marshall Farm located three miles from the campus—a poultry yard, dairy, livestock, beehives, and several pastures.¹⁵⁹ Although he had successes, most notably in increasing the crop yield on the school farms by sixfold over two years—in part by adding crop diversity, initiating crop rotation, and utilizing organic materials to naturally enrich the soil, techniques he had learned at Iowa Agricultural College—he also had conspicuous failures, particularly in managing the poultry yard.¹⁶⁰ The latter activity, which came to occupy an inordinate amount of Carver's time during the early 1900s, also led to an interdepartmental feud with George R. Bridgeforth, who had joined the Tuskegee Institute in 1902.¹⁶¹ Carver further inflamed the situation by repeatedly voicing his dissatisfaction to Washington, even submitting a mock resignation for effect.¹⁶² By the end of the decade, Washington had removed Carver as head of the agricultural department and reassigned him to a new position that had fewer responsibilities—director of the department of research and experiment station.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 45, 304.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 53, 58.

¹⁵⁸ Fishbein, "George Washington Carver," 2.

¹⁵⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 54.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-65.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 55-57, 63, 66-67.

¹⁶³ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 95, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 66-67.



Figure 24. George W. Carver lecturing to students at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, circa 1915. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

Whatever skills Carver may have lacked as an administrator, he certainly made up as a teacher. A natural showman with a quick sense of humor and love of storytelling, Carver entranced and engrossed his students.¹⁶⁴ His lectures, which included homespun wisdom, religious scripture, and occasional field trips, became a fixture of the institution from 1896 through the mid-1910s. He believed that his students learned best through the practical study of nature, which meant spending time outside the classroom gaining hands-on experience in the natural world.¹⁶⁵ Washington, writing in February 1911, observed that Carver was “a great teacher, a great lecturer, a great inspirer of young men and old men.”¹⁶⁶ Although the content of most of Carver’s classroom lectures is now lost to history, a few extracts remain:

A person is never completely educated; he only becomes an artist in the things he knows. Interest and ability are the only limitations on knowledge; the more one knows the wider he is known and the more useful is his life.

Make a contribution to the age in which you live. Be a leader.

¹⁶⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 95.

¹⁶⁵ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 100.

¹⁶⁶ Booker T. Washington to George W. Carver, February 26, 1911, Folder Correspondence 1 (1894-1896), Box 006.004, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

Explore, initiate, create, inspire, set precedents, watch your
pace - - - keep ahead!¹⁶⁷

Carver also taught “eight cardinal virtues,” a basic code of behavior for the school’s students.¹⁶⁸ He admonished them to be clean, warned against idolizing the wealthy, asked them to be considerate of the young and old, reminded them to never lie or cheat, and encouraged them to only take their share in life.¹⁶⁹ Finally, Carver was a natural mentor who took a genuine interest in the lives of his students.¹⁷⁰ Although he could be reticent and haughty with colleagues, he was always self-effacing and affectionate with his pupils. Whether these relationships were a consequence of the mentoring he received at Iowa Agricultural College by the likes of Budd, Wilson, and Pammel, or whether they had their roots earlier, perhaps in response to the many people who assisted him during his pursuit of schooling, such as the Watkinses, Seymours, and Milhollands, is difficult to judge. What was clear, however, was that Carver excelled at being a mentor, and his students reciprocated.

Although Carver remained a faculty member at the Tuskegee Institute until his death on January 5, 1943, he gradually withdrew from the classroom in the early 1910s as his fame and notoriety increased, first beyond the campus and then beyond the state. After the passing of Booker T. Washington on November 14, 1915, the new principal at the Tuskegee Institute, Robert Russa Moton, provided Carver with the freedom to pursue laboratory research and to travel.¹⁷¹ Carver became a popular speaker and lecturer throughout the South and, as early as 1917, was spending almost 50 percent of his time away from the school.¹⁷² Within a few years, his regular teaching duties had officially ended.¹⁷³ With fewer demands on his time, Carver transitioned to the final phase of his life, entering the public sphere and the popular imagination because of his work promoting scientific agriculture—and the peanut. Nonetheless, he remained committed to his former students and maintained close contact with them as they entered and progressed through their own careers. One former student, G. Lake Imes, writing in 1943, described a unique event at the college that spoke to the grounding and humor that Carver shared with his students. The occasion was a visit by Will Rogers, the American humorist, to the Tuskegee Institute. According to Imes, upon arriving, Rogers “lift[ed] his voice in a high-pitched treble which everybody instantly recognized as a clever imitation of Dr. Carver . . . [observing], ‘And this is the first time I ever saw a man with a tenor voice who amounted to anything!’”¹⁷⁴ Carver, who was sitting in the front row, surrounded by students, “joined in the laughter almost as heartily as the rest of the audience.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁷ Motta L. Sims, “Significant Statements Taken from Illustrated Lecture by George Washington Carver,” undated, Reel 45, Frame 0924-0925, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁸ G. W. Carver to L. Robinson, January 9, 1922, Reel 6, Frame 1000, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁹ G. W. Carver to L. Robinson, January 9, 1922, Reel 6, Frame 1000, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁰ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 108.

¹⁷¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 159-60.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁷³ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 168

¹⁷⁴ G. Lake Imes, *I Knew Carver* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Horace McFarland Co, 1943), 3-4.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Chapter Six

GEORGE W. CARVER IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

George W. Carver remained at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Macon County, Alabama, until his death at the approximate age of seventy-eight on January 5, 1943. In addition to his role as teacher, at which Carver excelled, he also entered the public sphere, first regionally and then nationally, as a leading proponent of scientific agriculture and practical farming. For more than three decades, Carver advocated scientific methods to Southern farmers—particularly black sharecroppers and tenants—who had become overly dependent on cotton. He stressed self-sufficiency through crop rotation, waste salvaging, crop diversification, and a renewed respect for the natural world. Carver achieved this by a number of means, including publishing informational bulletins, designing a mobile classroom to educate farmers, and researching alternative crops to cotton, such as soybeans, peanuts, and sweet potatoes. Yet Carver’s environmental thought was also tied to his religious faith, which ultimately brought him into conflict with the broader scientific community. Although he continued to suffer racial indignities during the 1920s and 1930s, Carver remained largely silent publicly on the issues of segregation and discrimination, although he did, at a personal level, seek to improve race relations. Carver’s eccentric personality also precipitated exaggerations of his scientific achievements, both during his lifetime and afterward. Nonetheless, Carver continued to be represented in the public sphere after his death. In July 1943, the George Washington Carver National Monument was established by Congress, and ten years later the George Washington Carver National Monument was formally dedicated.

A Leading Practitioner in Scientific Agriculture

When George W. Carver arrived in Macon County, Alabama, in October 1896, he found himself in an environment, both literally and figuratively, that was distinctly different from the region he had previously inhabited—the midwestern states of Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa. Writing to Louis H. Pammel, his former graduate advisor at Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm, on March 30, 1897, Carver remarked that Alabama was a “new world.”¹ Within this new world Carver found a different climate, different soil conditions, and a different approach to cultivation. Macon County was located within the Black Belt, a crescent-shaped region that extends through parts of Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.² The distinctive black soil, for which the region is named, had originally been quite fertile, but the cultivation of cash crops, that is, cotton, tobacco, rice, and sugar, beginning with large slave-based plantations during the antebellum period, had eroded and weakened the land.³ For Carver

¹ “Inventory of George W. Carver’s Correspondence with L. H. Pammel,” 1, Folder Inventory List – Correspondence, Carver Pammel n.d., Box 1, George Washington Carver Papers, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Ames, IA (hereafter Iowa State University).

² Mark D. Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation: An Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 52-53.

³ George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), 574; see also Linda O. McMurry, *George Washington Carver: Scientist and Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 116, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 61.

it was an anomaly—the region was blessed with a temperate climate, abundant rainfall (nearly sixty-six inches annually), and a lengthy growing season, but the environment, and those who inhabited it, were under strain. Interviewed by the *Montgomery Advertiser* in the late 1930s, Carver explained that “Wherever the soil is wasted the people are wasted. A poor soil produces only a poor people—poor economically, poor spiritually and intellectually, poor physically.”⁴

Carver was also troubled by the agrarian economic system, notably sharecropping and tenantry, that had developed throughout the Deep South after Reconstruction.⁵ Sharecroppers, laborers that worked the land for set wages, and tenants, independent farmers who rented land annually, found themselves entangled in a cycle of debt and poverty.⁶ Sharecropping and tenantry were originally promoted as a path toward economic freedom, allowing farmers of limited means to enter the labor system by first working, and then renting, agricultural land. Unfortunately for African Americans and, to a lesser extent, white farmers, the system only benefited the landlord and credit merchant. Tenant farmers often found themselves mortgaging their crops, typically at extremely high interest rates, either for the use of farm equipment, to purchase seeds, or for basic necessities.⁷ The system ultimately spiraled into one of financial servitude as tenant farmers and sharecroppers tried, usually unsuccessfully, to clear their outstanding debts at the end of each growing season.⁸ According to historian Mark D. Hersey, the black population in Macon County was nearly 19,000 shortly after Carver arrived in 1896, yet only 157 African Americans owned their own farms, while the remainder were either tenants or sharecroppers.⁹ Finally, sharecropping and tenantry increased the supply of cotton in the marketplace, which reduced the overall profitability of the crop, again, often to the detriment of the small farmer.¹⁰

Carver believed that the solution to the problems of the Deep South lay with applying scientific methods to farming—and making those methods known to the small farmer.¹¹ The goal of scientific agriculture was quite simple: through the introduction of scientific techniques, often framed in terms of practical or applied approaches, such as crop rotation, composting, and crop diversification, small farmers could eventually reduce their production costs and become self-sufficient.¹² At the same time, scientific agriculture offered the added benefit of revitalizing the soil by replacing outdated farming practices that caused erosion with techniques that improved fertility.¹³ Carver was the perfect champion for scientific agriculture in Alabama, and ultimately the broader South, as he had experienced life as a small farmer, first during his formative childhood on the Moses Carver farm and later while homesteading in western Kansas. As a farm laborer on the Moses Carver farm with his brother, James, from the late 1860s through the mid-1870s, Carver assisted with the cultivation of Indian corn, Irish potatoes, oats, and other crops. He also learned the importance of the farm garden, not just for his floral beauties,

⁴ George Washington Carver, “Top Soil and Civilization,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 21, 1938, 1.

⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 71-72.

⁶ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 71-72.

⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 71-72, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 72.

⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 71-72.

⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 72, 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 71-77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 85, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 2.

although that was important, but also for everyday subsistence. As a homesteader in Ness County in western Kansas between circa 1886 and 1888, Carver planted approximately ten acres of corn and rice corn, with only a spade hoe and corn planter, before abruptly ending the endeavor and losing the property to a creditor. He approached scientific agriculture not just as an academic exercise—he spoke the language and tilled the soil.

Carver's approach to scientific agriculture incorporated several interconnected themes. He advocated crop rotation, that is, the cultivation of different crops on the same field over time, as a way to maintain soil fertility and reduce soilborne pests.¹⁴ He also impressed upon farmers the need to salvage and reuse plant waste as a way to improve the quality of the soil.¹⁵ Carver advised farmers to plow under uncultivated vegetable matter and urged composting, observing, in April 1936, that “many thousands of tons of the finest fertilizers . . . [are] going to waste all over the South in the form of decaying leaves of the forest and the rich sediment of the swamp, known as ‘muck.’ Every idle moment should be put in gathering up these fertilizers.”¹⁶ He also recognized that it was difficult to promote self-sufficiency when absentee landlords ultimately controlled what was planted on their farms. When attempts to convert landlords to the benefits of self-sufficiency failed, Carver modified his approach and concentrated on finding crops that would be attractive to both farmers and landowners, which led to experimentation with sweet potatoes, cowpeas, and peanuts.¹⁷ He would continue to adapt his methods, and even change his course when necessary, throughout his career. Finally, Carver remained optimistic about the future of the South throughout his life. Writing to George Foster Peabody, a banker and philanthropist, in September 1932, Carver asserted “I believe more strongly now than ever before that the South is the richest section, . . . we will become a great manufacturing section, as well as an improved agricultural, dairying, and stock-raising section.”¹⁸ Carver's confidence in the South, the region in which he lived for nearly forty-seven years, was not always an opinion shared by his fellow African Americans.

Carver's assistance to Southern farmers took various forms. Probably the most influential was a series of informational bulletins he published as research director of the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station.¹⁹ Established in the spring of 1897 and funded in part by the state of Alabama, the Tuskegee station served as a clearinghouse, offering guidance on seeds and crop varieties and on planting schedules, as well as analyzing soil samples submitted by local farmers.²⁰ Carver published a total of forty-four bulletins over the course of his career, averaging, according to biographer Linda O. McMurry, approximately one to two bulletins per year, although the pace of publication slowed after 1915.²¹ He understood the

¹⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 118; see also Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 575.

¹⁵ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 194-95.

¹⁶ George W. Carver, *Can Live Stock Be Raised Profitably in Alabama?* Tuskegee Institute Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 41 (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute Press, April 1936), 3; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 90.

¹⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 85, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 130-42.

¹⁸ GWC to Dr. G. F. Peabody, September 20, 1923, Reel 7, Frame 0615-0616, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 72-77; see also B. D. Mayberry, *A Century of Agriculture in the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University – 1890-1990* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 60.

²⁰ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 124-27.

²¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 78.

importance of audience, which he recognized as local farmers and housewives, and to this end, the bulletins utilized simple language and an inspiring writing style to illustrate the value of scientific agriculture.²² Over the course of the series, Carver explored an array of topics including composting, organic fertilization, seed selection, livestock raising, gardening, the manufacture of paints and dyes, canning and preserving of fruits and vegetables, and alternative uses for sweet potatoes, cowpeas, and peanuts.²³ Although the content of the bulletins was not always original—many were based on information previously published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)—they served an extremely useful and practical purpose in the region.²⁴

Carver also believed in the value of personal instruction and demonstrations, something he had first witnessed as a student at Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm.²⁵ Beginning in late 1897, he organized monthly Farmers' Institutes for local sharecroppers and tenant farmers at the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station. Carver instructed farmers on crop rotation, plowing and cultivation techniques, gardening, terracing, and other farming methods.²⁶ He also organized, beginning in January 1904, an agricultural short course for local farmers. The six-week course, which was scheduled during the winter months so as not to interfere with the planting season, provided farmers with additional hands-on skills and expertise.²⁷ In 1906, at the urging of Booker T. Washington, Carver organized a traveling school known as the Jesup Agricultural Wagon, with funding provided by Morris K. Jesup, a white banker and philanthropist, and the John F. Slater Fund.²⁸ The wagon, which carried a milk separator, butter churn, and other farming implements, served as a mobile agricultural school and disseminated scientific techniques to the far corners of the state.²⁹ In 1918, the wagon was replaced by a demonstration truck known as the "Knapp Agricultural Truck," named in honor of Seaman A. Knapp, an early promoter of farm demonstration work and the former president of Iowa Agricultural College.³⁰ Carver also initiated an array of other outreach programs, from organizing summer schools for local black teachers that emphasized agricultural training, to taking it upon himself to develop attractive and innovative exhibits for county fairs, agricultural conferences, and African American schools.³¹ Summarizing his efforts in November 1926, Carver explained, "In a humble way, I am trying to do for the people of my Southland something like what my chief, Booker T. Washington, did for the people of my race by looking toward the industrial rather than the political side of life."³²

By the mid-1910s, Carver's work at the Tuskegee Institute was beginning to garner publicity, in both the white and black press, which would eventually transform him into a leading

²² Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 131, 148, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 78.

²³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 122, 238, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 131-33, 143.

²⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 78.

²⁵ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 112.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113, and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 162.

²⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 125-26.

²⁹ Mayberry, *A Century of Agriculture*, 67-70.

³⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 125-26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

³² Edwin E. Sparks, "The Wizard of The Goober and The Yam," *American Life*, November 1926, Reel 59, Frame 0839, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

figure of the African American community.³³ After the death of Booker T. Washington on November 14, 1915, Carver became the public face of the Tuskegee Institute. As his fame spread, he was increasingly sought after both as an expert for his agricultural knowledge and for his interest in sweet potatoes, cowpeas, and peanuts.³⁴ Newspapers and magazines, such as *Success Magazine*, *American Magazine*, *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, and the *New York Times*, ran features about his life—usually beginning with a description of his enslaved mother or his kidnapping.³⁵ In 1916, Carver was invited to serve on the advisory board of the National Agricultural Society and became an elected fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts in London.³⁶ The latter honor led to another round of glowing articles and profiles.³⁷ Much of the publicity focused on his work with the peanut, and indeed, between 1924 and 1938, Carver served as a consultant and technical advisor for the peanut industry.³⁸ Popularity, however, is not the same as innovation, and although much has been asserted over the years, Carver did not invent hundreds of uses for the peanut. His most recent biographer, Mark D. Hersey, rightly observed that:

The Peanut Man was in many respects a myth. Carver developed virtually no peanut products that were both original and marketable, but he did play an important role in popularizing a relatively unknown product.³⁹

Carver enjoyed his celebrity status, which again advanced when he was asked to testify before the House Committee on Ways and Means on January 21, 1921.⁴⁰ Speaking on behalf of the United Peanut Growers' Association, Carver presented a number of uses for the peanut, including stock food for animals, breakfast foods, flavoring for ice cream, dyes, milk, salad oils, ink, relish, and mock meat dishes.⁴¹ His testimony was presented with charm and grace, although there was one uncomfortable moment when Representative John Q. Tilson (R-CT) made a racially offensive remark.⁴² By the mid-1930s, Carver had become a worldwide sensation, a known entity across the United States and internationally. Interestingly, this was best represented by Carver's correspondence with Mahatma Gandhi [Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi], the Indian nationalist leader. Gandhi's emissaries contacted Carver in May 1935, after learning of his agricultural efforts, requesting information "in the hope that perhaps some of . . .

³³ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 154.

³⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 131.

³⁵ Barry Mackintosh, "George Washington Carver: The Making of a Myth," *Journal of Southern History* 42, no. 4 (November 1976): 517-19.

³⁶ "Biographical Sketch," undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

³⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 161.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

³⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 164.

⁴⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 155, 272, and "Biographical Sketch," undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴¹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2011), 111.

⁴² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 173.

[the] discoveries and inventions might be adaptable to Indian conditions and produce.”⁴³
George W. Carver was now firmly entrenched in the public sphere.

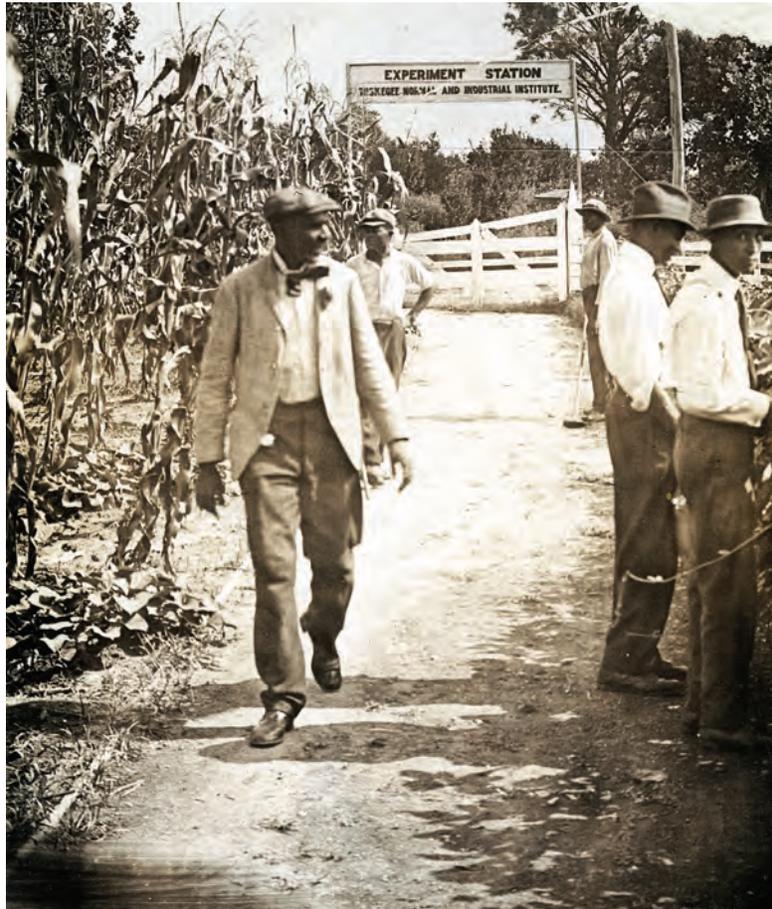


Figure 25. George W. Carver at the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station, 1920s. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

The Foundations of George W. Carver’s Environmental Thought

The reason why George W. Carver emerged as a leading practitioner in scientific agriculture is one of the more intriguing questions about his life. Of course, the simplest answer is because of his inherent fascination with the natural world and his educational background. Carver had found himself enrolled at Iowa Agricultural College, a well-equipped academic institution that focused on agricultural science. Upon moving to Alabama in 1896, Carver was then able to apply his academic training to several real-world problems—what we now call translational research. At the same time, however, Carver was operating within the confines of the larger conservation movement.⁴⁴ His desire to improve the soil through crop diversification and crop rotation mirrored a broader crusade to conserve natural resources that occurred during

⁴³ Richard B. Gregg to George Washington Carver, May 24, 1935, Reel 17, Frame 1133; see also G. W. Carver to M. K. Gandhi, July 27, 1935, Reel 17, Frame 1380, and Mahadev Desai to Dr. Carver, September 2, 1935, Reel 17, Frame 0907, all in Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁴⁴ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 128.

the Progressive Era.⁴⁵ Even at the Tuskegee Institute, Carver did not operate in a vacuum. It was Booker T. Washington, not Carver, who first sought to improve the conditions of black farmers through education. Soon after arriving in Alabama, in June 1881, Washington had traveled throughout Macon County. He found crops mortgaged, black farmers in debt, and a common diet of pork fat and corn bread, despite noting that there was enough land to “produce nearly every kind of garden vegetable that is raised anywhere in the country.”⁴⁶ As Gary R. Kremer astutely noted, Washington organized farmer conferences at the Tuskegee Institute, with the focus of teaching crop diversification and self-sufficiency, as early as 1892, a full four years before Carver arrived.⁴⁷ If Carver became the spokesperson of the movement, it was because others had paved the way for his ascendance.

It has also been argued that Carver’s environmental views were shaped by his formative years on the Moses Carver farm, particularly his experience with extreme poverty.⁴⁸ As an orphaned child who labored on a farm and lived in a former slave cabin with his older brother, Carver certainly did not have a lot of resources. Indeed, his early interest in collecting flowers, rocks, and insects, which we know occurred on the farm, may have been compensation for a lack of personal possessions and even linked to his deep feelings of insecurity.⁴⁹ In addition, Carver remained on the edge of poverty throughout his childhood and into his early adulthood. During his search for schooling and his wanderings through Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa, Carver often spoke of hunger and privation. His ability to survive these hardships, often due in part to his ability to salvage and reuse discarded items, certainly seemed to make him cognizant of the dangers of squandering resources.⁵⁰ In later years, and particularly during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Carver’s lectures often highlighted incidences of wastefulness among African American farmers with whom he came into contact. One famous example, which he often repeated, was a four-page letter he received from Texas requesting one of his informational bulletins. Carver was indignant, noting that his correspondent should have just posted a “one-cent post card.”⁵¹ For Carver the lesson was obvious: “It shows that we as a race have not learned what it means to save and economize. You as teachers must lay stress upon this, because it is of vital importance.”⁵²

Carver’s environmental thought was also a reflection of his deep religious faith.⁵³ He had converted to Christianity as a small boy on the Moses Carver farm. This spiritual awakening was a defining moment in his life and would later inform his view of the natural world. Although Carver joined the Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, Kansas, in 1883, he remained

⁴⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1901), 113.

⁴⁷ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 78.

⁴⁸ See Donald De B. Beaver, “George Washington Carver,” in *Encyclopedia of American Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 180.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 33.

⁵¹ “Notes on Dr. Carver’s Demonstration to Summer School Teachers,” 1936, Reel 46, Frame 0941-0943, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Beaver, “George Washington Carver,” 179.

nondenominational—albeit a faithful Evangelical Christian—throughout the majority of his life, enjoying the company of the Bible rather than organized church.⁵⁴ In February 1905, at the urging of several students, Carver organized a Bible class at the Tuskegee Institute.⁵⁵ The class, which met for a half-hour on Sunday evenings between supper and Chapel hours, was extremely popular and sometimes had upwards of one hundred students in attendance.⁵⁶ Describing the class in July 1916, Carver explained that it was “a fine opportunity to *parallel science and religion, and to show that there was no conflict between them* [italics in the original].⁵⁷ He continued to hold this doctrinal belief throughout his life—for him, science and religion were interconnected.⁵⁸ G. Lake Imes, who participated in the Bible class while attending the Tuskegee Institute, later wrote that Carver’s “favorite procedure was to take the Bible and beginning with the story of creation trace the parallel between the scripture narrative and the discoveries of science, pointing out how one confirmed the other.”⁵⁹ Indeed, by all accounts, Carver presented the Bible in an engaging and disarming way, often introducing topics that sparked discussion and debate among students. The subject of the class on March 30, 1930, for example, was titled, “Are our lives guided? If you think so give examples, if not give proof. Every young man should be present.”⁶⁰ This was not a sermon about fire and brimstone.⁶¹

Carver believed that one could receive divine inspiration through nature, and as such, he had a religious reverence for the natural world.⁶² Describing his religious outlook at the end of his life, Carver famously asserted that he saw “nature as wireless telegraph stations through which God speaks to us every day, every hour, and every moment of our lives.”⁶³ He believed that nature allowed him to commune with God, and his allusion to Communion, the Christian sacrament, was a deliberate reference.⁶⁴ Throughout his life, and particularly during his time at the Tuskegee Institute, Carver would often walk the woods in the early morning.⁶⁵ Describing these hikes to Frank H. Leavell, a reporter with the *Baptist Student*, Carver noted that “I am up each morning at or about four, and I go outdoors and look. I look at everything of nature, trees, birds, weeds, grass, insects, flowers. This is my way of communing—early in the morning.”⁶⁶ On another occasion, when a colleague sent some clippings about dendrochronology, or tree-ring

⁵⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 269, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 185.

⁵⁵ L. L. Toney and S. C. Aiken, “The Carver Bible Class in Tuskegee Institute, Its Origins,” Bible Class Materials, 1929-30, Box 1, Business and Personal Papers, Austin W. Curtis Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁵⁶ G. W. Carver to Mr. Griffith, July 3, 1916, Reel 5, Frame 0663, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; see also Toney and Aiken, “The Carver Bible Class.”

⁵⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 41.

⁵⁹ G. Lake Imes, *I Knew Carver* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Horace McFarland Co, 1943), 18-19.

⁶⁰ Bible Class Materials, 1929-30, Box 1, Business and Personal Papers, Austin W. Curtis Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

⁶¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 106.

⁶² Kimberly K. Smith, *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 3, 92-93.

⁶³ G. W. Carver to Dr. Edward F. Bigelow, ca. 1942, Reel 44, Frame 0399, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 187.

⁶⁶ Frank H. Leavell, “George Washington Carver: An Interview for Students,” *Baptist Student*, November 1938, Reel 59, Frame 0942-0944, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

dating, Carver responded that it was “an interesting natural phenomenon, and furnishes some of the finest proofs of divine guidance of anything with which I am acquainted.”⁶⁷ Carver also believed in stewardship of the environment, although he never articulated the concept in those exact terms.⁶⁸ What he did argue was that waste was man’s invention, the end result of the poor utilization of natural resources.⁶⁹ Jim Hardwick, a close confidant of Carver, later argued that Carver embraced the role of conservator, noting that during a private conversation he stated, “By nature I am a conserver. I have found nature to be a conserver. Nothing is wasted or permanently lost in nature. Things change their form, but they do not cease to exist.”⁷⁰ For Carver, the natural world was connected to spiritual truth.

Although he may have seen no conflict between science and religion, others did not always share this view, and on at least one occasion, in November 1924, Carver found himself at the center of controversy because of his faith.⁷¹ Invited to speak to a gathering of the Women’s Board of Domestic Missions of the Reformed Church in America, in New York City, Carver stated that his scientific achievements were a result of divine inspiration and further seemed to give pause to the importance of books.⁷² Two days after the event, on November 20, 1924, the *New York Times* published a scathing editorial titled “Men of Science Never Talk That Way.” The newspaper asserted:

It therefore is to be regretted, and none more than by the intelligent members of that race, that Dr. Carver, in discussing his own achievements, should use language that reveals a complete lack of scientific spirit. Real chemists, or at any rate other real chemists, do not scorn books out of which they can learn what other chemists have done, and they do not ascribe their successes, when they have any, to “inspiration.”

All who hear it will be inclined to doubt, perhaps unjustly, that Dr. Carver’s chemistry is appreciably different from the astronomy of the once famous Rev. John Jasper, who firmly maintained that the sun went around a flat earth.⁷³

The last remark, which referenced John Jasper, an antebellum preacher who utilized biblical references to argue that the sun revolved around the earth, was particularly biting for Carver who had, with much determination, obtained an advanced degree. Carver prepared a reply, which

⁶⁷ Carver to H. C. Abbott, undated, Reel 23, Frame 1208, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁶⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 189.

⁶⁹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 98, 309; see also Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 142, 182, 189.

⁷⁰ See Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (Cincinnati: Psyche Press, 1976), 157-60, and William J. Federer, *George Washington Carver: His Life & Faith in His Own Words* (St. Louis: Amerisearch Inc., 2008), 73-75.

⁷¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 208.

⁷² “‘Divine Inspiration Does Not Take the Place of Books,’ Dr. Carver Tells the Afro,” *Afro-American*, December 13, 1924, 18; see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 208.

⁷³ “Men of Science Never Talk That Way,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1924, 22.

was not published by the *New York Times*, and it was left to a black newspaper, the *Afro-American* in Baltimore, Maryland, to print the letter.⁷⁴

Carver's response was not so much a denial as an elaboration on his faith. Although he noted that he received the leading scientific publications and listed the titles of twenty-five books he utilized in his laboratory, Carver also quoted Galatians 1:12: "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ," arguing, with some hostility, "that if scientists believed more in God, many, many more things would be brought to light."⁷⁵ Almost eight months later, on July 7, 1925, Carver was still fixated on the episode, writing to an admirer that "Personally I know of no other source of which knowledge can come from."⁷⁶ Interestingly, and in another example of how chance sometimes benefited Carver, the controversy further popularized him, serving as another avenue in which he entered the public sphere.⁷⁷ In the wake of the Scopes trial of July 1925 in which a Protestant fundamentalist attempted to outlaw the teaching of human evolution in Tennessee public schools, Carver found himself embraced by the Christian community—and particularly the Evangelical press.⁷⁸ In the years ahead, numerous short booklets, such as *Saint, Seer and Scientist* and *The Man Who Talks with the Flowers; The Intimate Life Story of Dr. George Washington Carver*, as well as numerous magazine articles, promoted Carver's *weltanschauung*, or worldview, bringing him to the attention of a larger and more diverse audience.⁷⁹

In August 1938, after Carver was profiled in *Evangelical Christian*, he received several encouraging letters from missionaries operating in Africa. Esther A. Creighton, who was located in Irumu, in the northeast part of the Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), requested Carver's formula for peanut milk to use for orphaned babies. Creighton explained that fresh milk was limited in the Ituri forest due to tsetse flies but that the indigenous people, who were Muslim, "raise[d] loads of peanuts yearly, pounding it, and extracting the raw oil."⁸⁰ Creighton hoped that Carver's peanut milk could serve as an alternative to the tinned milk that the missionaries were purchasing for distribution to the population. Another individual, who was working in Northern Transvaal, South Africa, near Johannesburg, also requested Carver's scientific formulas, writing approvingly of his activities: "We thank God for raising up one whom He could trust and to whom He could reveal so many of His secrets, and through whom He has and will bless countless thousands."⁸¹

⁷⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 209.

⁷⁵ "Divine Inspiration," 18.

⁷⁶ G. W. Carver to W. O. Smyer, July 7, 1925, Reel 9, Frame 0014, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁷⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 209.

⁷⁸ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 179-82.

⁷⁹ See, for example, J. H. Hunter, *Saint, Seer and Scientist* (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1942), and Glenn Clark, *The Man Who Talks with the Flowers; The Intimate Life Story of Dr. George Washington Carver* (Saint Paul, MN: Macalester Park Publishing Co., 1939); see also McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 286.

⁸⁰ Esther A. Creighton to Brother in the Lord, July 28, 1938, Reel 25, Frame 0417-0418, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ Letter to Dr. George Washington Carver, August 8, 1938, Reel 25, Frame 0448, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

George W. Carver and the Race Question

During his years at the Tuskegee Institute, George W. Carver remained largely silent, in the public sphere at least, on the question of black political activism and the corresponding issues of segregation and discrimination. Some of this, of course, was due in part to Carver's longtime association with Booker T. Washington and the so-called Tuskegee Machine, a network of graduates, employees, and supporters who sought accommodation with whites in exchange for the economic advancement of blacks.⁸² But it also went much deeper. At the personal level, Carver believed that Christianity and the Golden Rule would eventually solve the race question.⁸³ This distinguished Carver from other African American activists, notably W. E. B. Du Bois, who rejected accommodation and urged protest as the path toward black equality.⁸⁴ Writing to Henry Overton on February 16, 1927, Carver asserted that:

Yes, we all hear much about the race question because it is ever before us naturally, and there is not any one or two things will settle it except this, the way of Christianity—that is the Golden Rule way of living. If we would all live in accordance with the Golden Rule, which is the “Jesus” way of living all race questions and issues would pale into insignificance.⁸⁵

Carver preached the idea of love for his fellow man throughout his life, and in many ways, this idea that Christianity could solve racial problems foreshadowed the faith-based, nonviolent civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁶ Finally, Carver warned against the dangers of hatred and bitterness, arguing that they poisoned social relations and only led to more acrimony.⁸⁷ Writing to George Foster Peabody in September 1923, Carver asserted, “I believe in the

⁸² Mackintosh, “The Making of a Myth,” 521.

⁸³ Linda O. Hines, “White Mythology and Black Duality: George W. Carver’s Response to Racism and the Radical Left,” *Journal of Negro History* 62, no. 2 (April 1977): 135, and Mackintosh, “The Making of a Myth,” 526. See also G. W. Carver to Henry Overton, February 16, 1927, Reel 10, Frame 0620, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Leavell, “Carver: An Interview for Students”; and GWC to Dr. G. F. Peabody, September 20, 1923, Reel 7, Frame 0615-0616, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸⁴ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), led by J. Edgar Hoover, investigated numerous African Americans beginning in the early 1930s. FBI surveillance files were kept on W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and, later, Martin Luther King Jr. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the FBI determined that the agency did not conduct an investigation of George W. Carver. See “Carver, George Washington,” April 2, 2013, FOIPA Request No. 1210058-000, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁵ G. W. Carver to Henry Overton, February 16, 1927, Reel 10, Frame 0620, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸⁶ Hines, “White Mythology and Black Duality,” 134. Faith-based organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, organized in 1957, played a vital role in the civil rights movement.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 135; see also Rebecca Caudill, “A Scientist in God’s Workshop,” *Our Young People*, January 16, 1922, Reel 59, Frame 0845-0847, and George Washington Carver to J.T.H., December 25, 1928, Reel 11, Frame 0501, both in Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

providence of God working in the hearts of men, and that the so-called, Negro problem will be satisfactorily solved in His own good time, and in His own way.”⁸⁸

Like other African Americans, Carver continued to suffer the consequences of racial segregation and discrimination during the first half of the twentieth century. Writing to John and Helen Milholland in February 1905, he reflected on the humiliating and demeaning racial indignities he witnessed in the Deep South. “For eight long years,” Carver recounted, “I have labored here, and oh so often I have been shocked and made sick at heart over the many terrible things perpetrated upon our brother and sister man on account of their color.”⁸⁹ Carver also found himself physically threatened on at least one occasion. In late November 1902, Carver traveled to Ramer, Alabama, with Frances Benjamin Johnston, a prominent photographer and early photojournalist, who also happened to be both white and female, to document conditions at a small black school.⁹⁰ After arriving in town, Carver and Johnston were joined by the local black teacher, Nelson E. Henry. Whether it was because a white woman was traveling with a black man or because African Americans were not allowed entry into Ramer at night, their arrival sparked a violent reaction—they were fired at three times.⁹¹ Although the group was able to flee, Johnston by train and Carver by walking through the night, Carver later described the episode to Booker T. Washington as one of “the most frightful experience[s] of my life.”⁹²

As Carver aged, he also found racial segregation to be increasing burdensome on his travel schedule. On July 10, 1924, for example, at the approximate age of fifty-nine, Carver declined an invitation to lecture, noting “I am getting no younger and the ‘Jim Crow’ accommodations cause me to say no a great many times because my physical strength will not stand it.”⁹³ The difficulty of undertaking a journey was further evidenced six years later when Carver and an associate were denied access to a Pullman car they had reserved on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad while traveling through Oklahoma.⁹⁴ Both men were forced to ride in a segregated coach for the duration of the trip.⁹⁵ Incidents of racial discrimination were not just limited to the South. In 1939, Carver was refused a room at the New Yorker Hotel while traveling to New York City.⁹⁶ He was only given his room when a vice president of Doubleday, Doren and Company, the publisher of a biography on Carver, arrived at the hotel and threatened legal action.⁹⁷ Carver later wrote to a well-wisher that “I cannot help letting my heart go out to

⁸⁸ GWC to Dr. G. F. Peabody, September 20, 1923, Reel 7, Frame 0615-0616, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁸⁹ Gary R. Kremer, *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 151-52.

⁹⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 120.

⁹¹ George Washington Carver to B. T. Washington, November 28, 1902, Reel 2, Frame 0495-0497, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Carver to Prof. Geo. W. Owens, July 10, 1924, Reel 8, Frame 0048, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹⁴ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 229.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ G. W. Carver to Esther Merrill, November 15, 1939, Reel 31, Frame 1129, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹⁷ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 275-77.

the New Yorker Hotel and its management with the hope that nothing like this ever happens again. We can depend upon the dear Lord to mete out justice where needed.”⁹⁸

The color line also obstructed Carver’s scientific research and even his love of art. When Carver began investigating the use of peanut oil massages for the treatment of poliomyelitis (also known as polio or infantile paralysis) during the 1930s, he realized that it would be imprudent to treat white women. Writing to Adahlia Johnson on November 12, 1935, Carver noted, “Of course, you can readily see why I do not treat women; solely on account of misunderstandings which would undoubtedly arise.”⁹⁹ On another occasion, circa 1937, Carver was asked to conduct some research on naval stores, that is, products obtained from pine sap, by the Southern Naval Stores Co., Inc., in Savannah, Georgia. Carver politely declined the request, explaining “to undertake working it out I would have to go places and get certain information that at the present time I could not do, owing to my race.”¹⁰⁰ In November 1922, E. M. de Pencier, an advertising manager at the Peanut Growers Association, contacted Carver about a new product they were considering—“Pickaninny” peanuts. Although Carver supported the business prospect, he balked at the product trademark, counseling de Pencier, “Now, my people object seriously to their children being called ‘Pickaninnies.’”¹⁰¹ The question of race even thwarted his enjoyment of art museums. On September 3, 1934, Carver contacted the Museum of Fine Arts in Montgomery, Alabama. By this juncture in his career, he had received numerous awards and honors, yet his handwritten note was necessarily restrained: “Dear Madam: This is to inquire if Colored people are allowed to visit the museum, if so at what hours? Yours very truly G. W. Carver.”¹⁰²

Carver’s relationship with African American organizations that lobbied for equal rights, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), is also intriguing. He was awarded the Spingarn Medal, the NAACP’s award for the highest or noblest achievement during the preceding year, in 1923, yet there was little interaction between Carver and the organization over the course of his career.¹⁰³ Although the citation prepared by the Spingarn Medal Committee enthusiastically recognized Carver’s election to the Royal Society for the Arts in London, his ongoing lectures on agriculture “before white and colored audiences,” and his “clear thought and straight-forward attitude,” there were few policy discussions between him and the executive leadership.¹⁰⁴ On the few occasions that Du Bois and Carver did communicate, for example, June 29, 1923, the content was provincial and procedural:

⁹⁸ G. W. Carver to Harvey J. Hill, January 25, 1940, Reel 32, Frame 0758, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹⁹ G. W. Carver to Mrs. Adahlia Johnson, November 12, 1935, Reel 18, Frame 0510, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁰ G. W. Carver to B. A. Anderson, ca. 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0560, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰¹ G. W. Carver to E. M. de Pencier, November 29, 1922, Reel 7, Frame 1107, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰² G. W. Carver to Curator of the Museum of Fine Arts, September 3, 1934, Lot 34048, Auction #6044, 2010 June Signature Historical Manuscripts, Heritage Auctioneers & Galleries, Inc., Dallas, Texas.

¹⁰³ “Biographical Sketch,” undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁴ Secretary to Miss Suados, January 9, 1943, Box II:A167, Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

I should be very glad indeed to have any further details concerning the commercial value of your chemical discoveries. I want to stress two things in your case, one, the impression that you have made upon the white South and two, the value of your chemical work.¹⁰⁵

On another occasion, December 10, 1935, Carver seemed indifferent when asked by Du Bois to prepare an article for a planned encyclopedia on African Americans. Although Carver agreed that the volume would be of intellectual value, he was uncertain if he could “comply with . . . [the] request.”¹⁰⁶

Carver also failed to develop long-term relationships with other black leaders, either inside or outside the NAACP, including Walter White, Mary White Ovington, Mary Church Terrell, Carter G. Woodson, and Marcus Garvey. Although White contacted Carver in March 1930 requesting information about the racial discrimination he experienced on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, and ultimately drafted a letter to the railway company requesting an explanation of the episode, their interaction was limited.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the only other extant correspondence between the two men was from December 30, 1940, after White briefly visited the Tuskegee Institute to pay homage to the ailing scientist. Although White’s letter to Carver was extremely complimentary, his postscript, which requested an autographed picture, does not indicate a particularly familiar relationship.¹⁰⁸ Other communications between Carver and the leadership of the NAACP, including correspondence with Ovington and Terrell, focused on publicizing Carver’s accomplishments rather than policy issues relating to segregation or discrimination.¹⁰⁹ Carver’s interactions with Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and author of *The Negro in Our History* (1922), are more interesting. On May 10, 1929, Carver requested a list of pictures and books on African Americans for distribution to school students, explaining that “there was a great opportunity along this line.”¹¹⁰ Finally, it is evident that Carver was against Garvey’s efforts to return American blacks to Africa, as the *Ithaca Journal News* reported on February 19, 1925, that

¹⁰⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois to George Washington Carver, June 29, 1923, Correspondence 1922-24, Austin W. Curtis Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

¹⁰⁶ G. W. Carver to Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, December 10, 1935, Reel 18, Frame 0621, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Carver and Du Bois had different temperaments and this may have influenced their communications. Biographer Gary R. Kremer noted, for example, that Carver described Du Bois as a “disappointed misanthrope.” See Kremer, *Carver: In His Own Words*, 166.

¹⁰⁷ Walter White to George W. Carver, March 13, 1930, and G. W. Carver to Mr. White, March 15, 1930, both in Box I:C277, Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁸ Walter White to Dr. Carver, December 30, 1940, Reel 35, Frame 0136, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁹ Mary White Ovington to President, Iowa State Agricultural College, January 7, 1927, GWCNM Library, and Mary Church Terrell to Dr. Carver, April 17, 1929, Reel 11, Frame 0844, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁰ G. W. Carver to Carter G. Woodson, May 10, 1929, Reel 11, Frame 0894, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Carver “declared himself opposed to any such attempt.”¹¹¹ That said, many African Americans opposed Garvey’s proposal and his black nationalist message.

Carver also remained outside the scope of the Harlem Renaissance—and probably felt more at home at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum with members of the fundamentalist movement. His most extensive public comments on racial issues occurred in February 1925 when he spoke at the Cosmopolitan Club (Cornell University) in Ithaca, New York. Carver was mostly positive on the progress of African American equality, noting that improvements to the race problem were occurring “faster than is generally realized, through such channels as education and common understanding.”¹¹² At the same time, he argued that racial hatred was a fifty-fifty proposition, with “as much bitter hatred towards the white race among colored people, especially the younger generation, as there is among the whites towards them.”¹¹³ The reaction to Carver’s comments by Du Bois and other African American leaders is not known, but by the late 1930s, Carver had stopped commenting on the race question publicly. Writing to Creed Quinn Jr. on December 3, 1938, Carver explained:

I wish to say that I make it a practice not to discuss the race question. My time is given wholly to research and investigation for the relief of suffering humanity, and the vast amount of correspondence which comes to me on this subject alone makes it impossible for me to devote my time to any other work.¹¹⁴

Whether Carver continued to provide commentary on racial issues in private is not known.

One organization that Carver did support, and took a leadership role with, was the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), based in Atlanta, Georgia. The organization, which had been founded in 1919, was organized in response to Southern racial violence, including lynchings, mob violence, and peonage, and encouraged interracial cooperation as a way to solve these problems. Unlike the NAACP, the CIC steered clear of the issue of segregation as a matter of policy and instead focused on educating and influencing Southern decision-makers “through biracial local and state committees.”¹¹⁵ The CIC did have a number of successes, and with the support of Robert Russa Moton, who succeeded Booker T. Washington as the principal of the Tuskegee Institute, the organization was able to expand black educational opportunities in the South. During the 1920s, the CIC organized a number of college conferences to increase dialogue among white and black students.¹¹⁶ Carver became a popular participant in these conferences, and he also became a traveling spokesperson for the CIC, often spending summers on goodwill tours to colleges and universities. During one tour in the early

¹¹¹ “Sees Education as Solution of Race Problems,” *Ithaca Journal News*, February 19, 1925, Reel 60, Frame 0731, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*; see also Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 167.

¹¹⁴ G. W. Carver to Creed Quinn, Jr., December 3, 1938, Reel 26, Frame 0932, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁵ Julia Anne McDonough, “Men and Women of Good Will: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919-1954” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1993), 20.

¹¹⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 200-201.

1930s, Carver made approximately thirty-three stops in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. For the most part, Carver spoke at white universities, but the circuit also included stops at some black churches and schools.¹¹⁷ It is important to note, however, that the subject of his lectures rarely dealt with the question of race, instead focusing on nonconfrontational issues such as his scientific research.¹¹⁸

On one such speaking tour, during the summer of 1923, Carver addressed the Southern regional conference in Blue Ridge, North Carolina, hosted by the CIC and the Young Men's Christian Association, or YMCA.¹¹⁹ At the conference, he met Jim Hardwick, a white student at Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute (now Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University), who would become one of his "Carver boys," a group of young men who received his spiritual guidance and encouragement.¹²⁰ A January 16, 1922, article by Rebecca Caudill, which appeared in the youth magazine *Our Young People*, described the relationship that Carver cultivated:

These "boys" are not his sons, for Mr. Carver has never married. They are young men from Yale and Harvard, Princeton and Massachusetts Tech, Emory and Henry and Vanderbilt, V.P.I. and S.M.U., and scores of universities all over the United States and Canada, who have had the rare privilege to become acquainted with Mr. Carver. . . . They come to Tuskegee to see him during their summer vacations. They discuss with him anything and everything. They bring their problems to air in his presence.¹²¹

Carver coached the group to serve as ambassadors of interracial cooperation. He saw the young men as his disciples and on several occasions even referenced the New Testament relationship between Paul and Timothy.¹²² Carver believed that the boys would one day change the world, noting "I can see through it all so clearly, why God gave you precious boys to me. And that wonderful pioneering you are doing. We must multiply our little family of great spiritual boys. I see no other way to save the world."¹²³ But Carver's goodwill tours were not without

¹¹⁷ Dorothy Kehlenbeck, "Interview with Alfred Zissler," June 8, 1968, 1-3, Folder Oral History Interview – Alfred Zissler 1968, Box 2, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University.

¹¹⁸ Mackintosh, "The Making of a Myth," 522.

¹¹⁹ Federer, *Carver: His Life & Faith*, 43-44, and John Perry, *Unshakable Faith: Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 1999), 329.

¹²⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 202-3.

¹²¹ Caudill, "A Scientist in God's Workshop."

¹²² Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of This Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 32-35; see, for example, Carver to Mr. Hardwick, January 30, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 0744, and G. W. Carver to My Very Own Handsome Marvelous Spiritual Boy, July 11, 1931, Reel 12, Frame 1234, both in Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹²³ G. W. Carver to Mr. Hardwick, undated, Reel 13, Frame 0258, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

confrontations. On several occasions he experienced discrimination and prejudice, including shouted racial insults and denied access to train cars, hotel rooms, and restaurants.¹²⁴



Figure 26. George W. Carver at a speaking engagement, circa 1930s. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

The Public Interpretation of George W. Carver

Public reverence for George W. Carver continued during the 1930s and through his death at the approximate age of seventy-eight on January 5, 1943. During the final decades of his life, a Carver myth was created—the result of several internal and external forces—that transformed the aging educator and agriculturist into a latter-day “folk saint.”¹²⁵ The Carver myth has been well studied by historians and scholars, but several points necessitate repeating. Most biographers trace the Carver myth to Booker T. Washington and his profile of the young instructor in his seminal biography titled *My Larger Education* (1911).¹²⁶ Interestingly,

¹²⁴ Kehlenbeck, “Interview with Alfred Zissler,” 1.

¹²⁵ Hines, “White Mythology and Black Duality,” 134.

¹²⁶ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 3, and Mackintosh, “The Making of a Myth,” 522.

Washington found it necessary to clandestinely obtain the background information he used for the profile—which may speak to the stormy relationship the two men had at the Tuskegee Institute. In late 1897, Washington approached Sophia Liston, Carver’s close friend from Indianola, Iowa, and had her request a biographical sketch from Carver. Carver remained unaware that the material he prepared was for Washington’s consumption.¹²⁷ Washington’s profile recounted Carver’s early life, including the kidnapping episode, and stated that he was “one of the most gifted men of the Negro race whom I ever happened to meet.”¹²⁸ Washington’s emphasis on Carver’s empowerment in the face of enormous hardships fit well with the mission of the Tuskegee Institute and also set the boundaries of the later Carver mythology, which emphasized education, sacrifice, and humility.¹²⁹ Almost as important, however, was the fact that Carver took an active role in the myth-making process.¹³⁰ As noted in chapter three, Carver enjoyed retelling his life story and never passed an opportunity to remind admirers that he started life as a poor, defenseless orphan.¹³¹ The Carver myth also benefited from Carver’s inherent eccentricities. For the majority of his four decades at the Tuskegee Institute, he lived in the school dormitory, Rockefeller Hall, and remained withdrawn from other faculty members.¹³² Carver also enjoyed collecting weeds to supplement his diet and, according to one former student, “wore the same garments until they became threadbare.”¹³³ For the majority of the American public in the 1930s, Carver was a black Horatio Alger. Indeed, it was during this period that most newspapers and magazines took to referring to Carver not as G. W. Carver, or George W. Carver, but rather “George Washington Carver.”¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Volume 4: 1895-98* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 333-36.

¹²⁸ Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education* (Garden City: Doubleday Page & Company, 1911), 223.

¹²⁹ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 122.

¹³⁰ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 177, 256, and Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 165.

¹³¹ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 4, 13.

¹³² Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 86; Kremer, *Carver: In His Own Words*, 85; and McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 48.

¹³³ Imes, *I Knew Carver*, 10.

¹³⁴ See Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

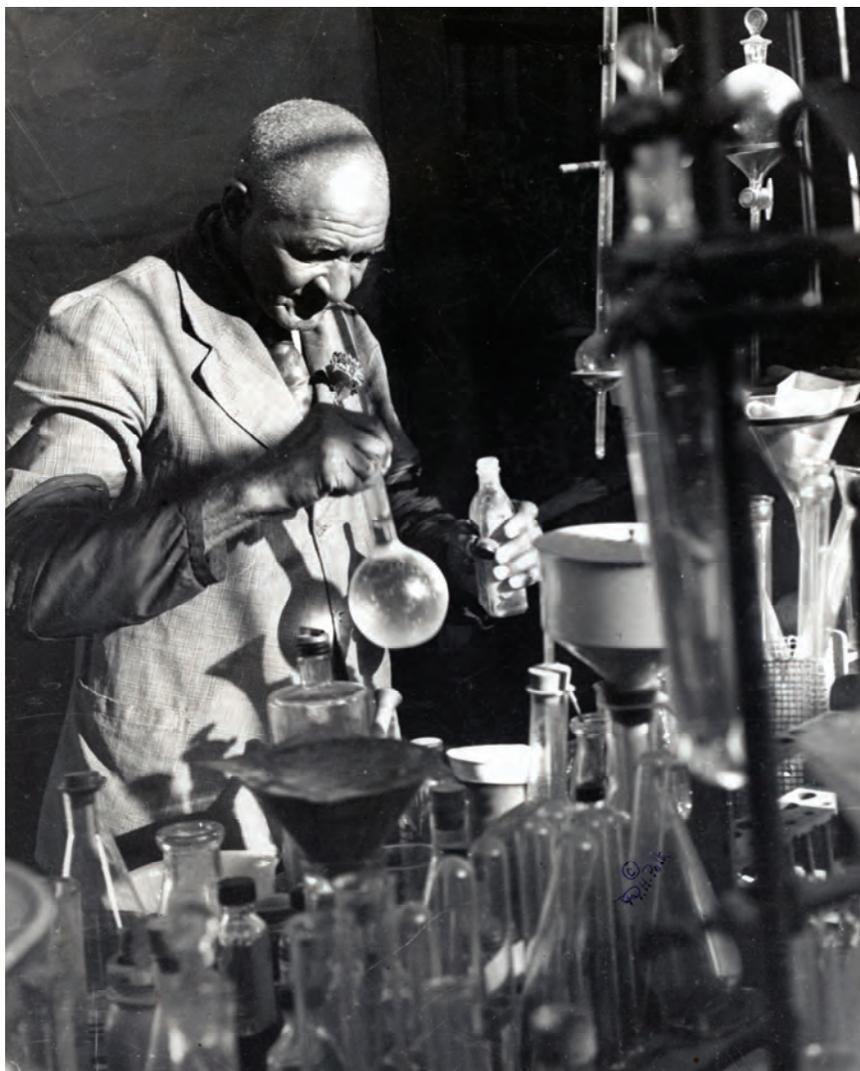


Figure 27. George W. Carver working in his laboratory, 1930s. *The Tuskegee University Archives, Tuskegee University.*

During Carver's lifetime, some contemporaries contested his accomplishments and others had mixed views about his contributions to science.¹³⁵ One reason was that, except for the informational bulletins he published through the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station and the articles he wrote in graduate school, Carver had no record of scientific publications.¹³⁶ During the 1920s, Carver moved into the burgeoning field of creative chemistry but again failed to publish results of his experiments or information on his accomplishments.¹³⁷ In many ways, Carver's scientific success was hampered by poor record-keeping in his laboratory.¹³⁸ He failed to maintain laboratory notebooks, and the few research notes that survive pertaining to amaryllis experiments consist of less than three hundred pages and are a jumbled mess.¹³⁹ An

¹³⁵ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist and Symbol*, 58, 178, 209, 232, 255, 305.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹³⁷ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 168-69.

¹³⁸ McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 246.

¹³⁹ Notes, circa 1919, Reel 48, Frame 0019-0022, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

investigation into Carver's scientific contributions, prepared by William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer in 1962 and funded by the National Park Service (NPS), spoke to the issue of unaccounted laboratory records, concluding "If Dr. Carver did not keep such records, regardless of his reasons for not doing so, he lacked one of the chief attributes of a scientist. Any one who might wish to pursue the studies of Carver's research must start from the beginning."¹⁴⁰

Carver's scientific research that did enter the public sphere, such as Penol, an emulsion of creosote with peanut extracts that was sold by the Carver Penol Company, also proved ineffective.¹⁴¹ The patent medicine, which was introduced in the late 1920s as a cure for respiratory illnesses, was eventually "invalidated" by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USDA).¹⁴² Although Carver was awarded three U.S. patents between 1925 and 1927, two for paint processes and one for cosmetics, they also had only marginal impact.¹⁴³ By far the most interesting assessment of Carver's scientific achievements was provided by Henry A. Wallace. Wallace, a talented plant breeder who served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and later as vice president, had known Carver since his days in Ames, Iowa. When asked to comment on Carver's scientific accomplishments in July 1923, Wallace stated, "Dr. Carver is not a scientist in the ordinary sense of the term, but he has done some worthwhile things. In certain fields of knowledge he has gone a long way although there are many curious blank spots."¹⁴⁴

These issues aside, by the end of his life, Carver enjoyed numerous accolades. In 1928, he received an honorary doctor of science degree from Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa.¹⁴⁵ Carver received additional honorific degrees, from the University of Rochester and Selma University, in 1941 and 1942, respectively.¹⁴⁶ Beginning in 1935, he served as a collaborator for the Mycology and Plant Disease Survey, part of the Bureau of Plant Industry, at the USDA.¹⁴⁷ Carver also had the pleasure of seeing two book-length biographies published in his honor, the first by Raleigh H. Merritt and the second by Rackham Holt. During the late 1930s, and

¹⁴⁰ William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer, "The Scientific Contributions of George Washington Carver," 1962, 27, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, George Washington Carver National Monument Library, Diamond, Missouri (hereafter GWCNM Library). Dana R. Chandler, university archivist at Tuskegee University Archives, has apparently located some additional laboratory notebooks created by George W. Carver. Mr. Chandler has indicated that these materials were not microfilmed by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission nor reviewed by William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer. Mr. Chandler eventually plans to have the notebooks annotated and published in book form. They are currently unavailable to researchers or the general public. Telephone call, Jason H. Gart and Dana R. Chandler, September 26, 2013.

¹⁴¹ Toby Fishbein, "George Washington Carver," April 1976, 2, and Dorothy Kehlenbeck, "Dr. George Washington Carver," 3-4, both in Folder Biographical 1895-2006, Box 1, File RS 21/7/2, George Washington Carver Collection, Iowa State University. The Carver Penol Company was founded by Ernest Thompson, George W. Carver's erstwhile business manager, and several other Tuskegee investors, in the mid-1920s. Carver served as scientific advisor to the company and provided guidance on the manufacture of the emulsion. See McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 182-93.

¹⁴² McMurry, *Carver: Scientist & Symbol*, 195.

¹⁴³ Louis Harber, *Black Pioneers of Science and Invention* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), 119.

¹⁴⁴ H. A. Wallace to A. R. Elliott, undated, Reel 48, Frame 0808, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁵ "Biographical Sketch," undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁶ Fishbein, "George Washington Carver," 3.

¹⁴⁷ "Biographical Sketch," undated, Reel 67, Frame 0381, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

continuing apace after his death, several public schools were named in Carver's honor. In 1937, for example, Carver attended the dedication of the George Washington Carver Elementary School in Fulton, Missouri.¹⁴⁸ During the mid-1920s, there were even rumors circulating that Carver might become the first African American to receive the Nobel Prize (he was not—that honor went to Ralph Bunche in 1950).¹⁴⁹ Carver became good friends with Henry Ford, and in May 1942, Ford recreated Carver's childhood slave cabin at Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.¹⁵⁰ The cabin, known as the George Washington Carver Birthplace Building, was intended as a lasting tribute to Carver and his humble beginnings. In March 1940, Carver donated \$33,000 to the Tuskegee Institute for the establishment of the George Washington Carver Foundation.¹⁵¹ Additionally, in August 1941, the local branch of the NAACP in Missouri requested that a highway marker be placed near Neosho, Missouri, to honor the birthplace of the black scientist.¹⁵² Carver died on January 5, 1943, after a lengthy battle with pernicious anemia and was buried at the Tuskegee Institute.¹⁵³ Addressing the loss, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that "The world of science has lost one of its most eminent figures and the race from which he sprang an outstanding member."¹⁵⁴

The Establishment of the George Washington Carver National Monument

The effort to establish a national monument in honor of George Washington Carver began in the early 1940s and was part of several posthumous recognitions that included, among other things, the commissioning of the SS *George Washington Carver*, a Liberty ship built for the U.S. Maritime Commission in 1943 and the issuing of a three-cent commemorative postage stamp in 1948. By the 1920s, the Moses Carver farm, also known as the Old "Diamond Grove" Plantation by local residents, had undergone significant transformation. After the death of Moses Carver in 1910, the property had been sold, first to Samuel Warden and then to C. M.

¹⁴⁸ "Famous Scientist of Tuskegee Institute Returns to Native Missouri to Speak at Opening of \$50,000 Building Named for Him," 1937, G. W. Carver Notebook, Tuskegee University Archives. The total number of public schools that were named for George W. Carver is difficult to determine but probably once numbered near fifty. The practice of naming public buildings for civic leaders, notably U.S. Presidents and heroes, has declined in the last two decades. See Jay P. Greene, Brian Kisida, and Jonathan Butcher, "What's in a Name? The Decline in the Civic Mission of School Names," July 2007, Civic Report No. 5, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

¹⁴⁹ Axel Lundeberg to George W. Carver, October 20, 1925, Reel 9, Frame 0268, and G. W. Carver to J, October 21, 1925, Reel 9, Frame 0274, both in Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Lundeberg wrote "Last spring I was about to send a communication about your work to Sweden, but was prevented through the sudden and unexpected death of the Premier of that country. [Karl] Hjalmar Branting, who was a personal friend of mine, and by whom I expected to log your scientific achievements before the Nobel Institute, but I have other channels by means of which I might be able to call attention to your work if I get first hand information from yourself." Axel Lundeberg to George W. Carver, October 20, 1925, Reel 9, Frame 0268, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁰ "Departmental Communication," May 14, 1942, Correspondence 1937-1938, 1942-1945, G. W. Carver, Accession E.I. 186, Porches and Parlors District Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹⁵¹ "When Dr. Carver Gave Tuskegee \$33,000," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 2, 1940.

¹⁵² "NAACP Asks Sign to Show Dr. Carver's Birthplace," *Afro-American*, August 9, 1941, 22.

¹⁵³ "Inscription on Grave of Dr. George Washington Carver," Newspaper Clippings, Vertical Files, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁵⁴ "Telegrams Received at Dr. Carver's Death," January 6, 1943, The White House, Vertical Files, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee University Archives.

Shartel.¹⁵⁵ About 1916, several additional structures were built on the property, and the Moses Carver late period dwelling, which was constructed circa 1881, was moved to its current location and remodeled.¹⁵⁶ Although George W. Carver often referenced the farm during his time at the Tuskegee Institute, it appeared that he made no effort to visit Newton County after 1908.¹⁵⁷ On one occasion, in October 1927, Carver apparently passed through Neosho, Missouri, en route to Tulsa, Oklahoma. He wrote to Eva Goodwin that “the train stopped for quite a little while at Neosho but it was dark and I could not recognize nothing.”¹⁵⁸ The idea of establishing the national monument appeared to have originated with Richard Pilant, a local resident and distant relative of Moses and Susan Carver.¹⁵⁹ On June 22, 1942, Pilant met with Carver at the Tuskegee Institute to discuss the land acquisition, and in early 1943 the NPS conducted an on-site investigation of the birthplace property.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, the memorial was framed in terms of its value to the war effort. One commentator noted that the national monument would be “in essence a blow against the Axis, it is in essence a war measure in the sense that it will further unleash and release the energies of roughly 15,000,000 Negro people in this country in full support of our war effort.”¹⁶¹ On July 14, 1943, the 78th Congress passed the legislation that established the George Washington Carver National Monument, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law (57 Statute 563, PL 78-148) the same day.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ National Park Service, *Cultural Landscapes Inventory 2010, George Washington Carver National Monument*, 2010, 20, Folder George Washington Carver National Monument, NPS 2006-SW-AS-028 Statewide, Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Missouri State Historic Preservation Office; see also Charles W. Porter III, “Report on an Investigation of George Washington Carver’s Birthplace at the Old ‘Diamond Grove’ Plantation Near Diamond, Newton County, Missouri,” February 24-March 5, 1943, Boxes 187-188, George Washington Carver National Monument, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service-Region II Omaha, NARA-Central Plains (Kansas City).

¹⁵⁶ Paul L. Beaubien and Merrill J. Mattes, “George Washington Carver National Monument: The Archeological Search for George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” *Negro History Bulletin* 18, no. 2 (November 1954): 34, and NPS, *Cultural Landscapes Inventory 2010*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ CHS, “Summary of Various Statements,” April 28, 1959, GWCNM Library.

¹⁵⁸ Kremer, *Carver: In His Own Words*, 40.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Duncan Burchard, “George Washington Carver: For His Times and Ours, Special History Study: Natural History Related to George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” December 2005, 1, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, George Washington Carver National Monument.

¹⁶⁰ George W. Carver to Dr. W. F. Clark, June 22, 1942, Reel 41, Frame 0884, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, and Porter, “George Washington Carver’s Birthplace,” 1.

¹⁶¹ Burchard, “Carver: For His Times and Ours,” 3.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.



Figure 28. “Democracy in Action” by Charles Alston. A wartime cartoon prepared by the Office of Emergency Management, 1943. *National Archives and Records Administration*.

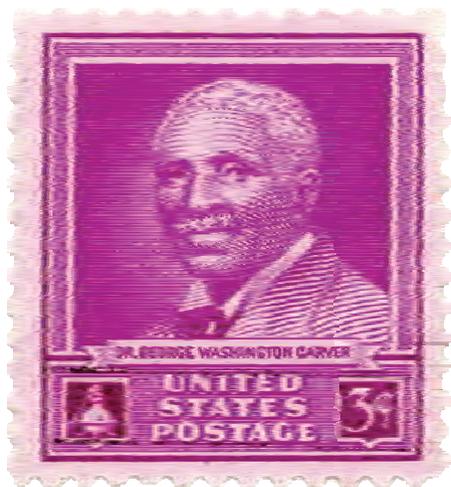


Figure 29. U.S. postage stamp honoring Dr. George Washington Carver, issued on January 5, 1948. *Bureau of Engraving and Printing, U.S. Department of the Treasury*.

The George Washington Carver National Monument was formally dedicated on July 14, 1953, ten years after its designation.¹⁶³ The monument has the unique distinction of being the first national monument honoring both the accomplishments of an African American and the first unit of the NPS so designated for someone other than a president.¹⁶⁴ The mission of the monument is “to maintain, preserve, and interpret, in a suitable and enduring manner, the life and legacy of George Washington Carver for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States of America.”¹⁶⁵ Between 1952 and 1973, as part of their efforts to administer the site and interpret the life of Carver, the NPS demolished eighteen noncontributing farm buildings that had remained on the property after its purchase.¹⁶⁶ These included the main house, springhouse, tenant house, main barn, loafing shed, chicken house, pig sty, granary, bull pen, rabbit house, and cowshed and feeder barn. The monument currently includes both modern components, interpretive features that were constructed by the NPS to assist in the interpretation of Carver, as well as extant historic, natural, and cultural resources, features that can be directly tied to Carver’s time on the farm. Modern components include a sculpture of Carver as a young boy by Robert Amendola, a cast concrete bust of Carver by Audry Corwin, a dedication plaque, walking trails, restored prairie, Williams Pond, a visitor center and museum, archeological sites pertaining to Carver’s birthplace cabin, and administrative and maintenance facilities.

¹⁶³ Kremer, *Carver: A Biography*, 184.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “George Washington Carver National Monument Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” November 2007, 7, GWCNM Library.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Anna Coxe Toogood, “Historic Resource Study and Administrative History, George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri,” prepared for the National Park Service (Denver: Denver Service Center, July 1973), 69, 84.

The extant historic, natural, and cultural resources consist of three small creeks, the Carver cemetery, the Moses Carver late period dwelling, and the 240-acre historic landscape. Each of these resources provides a different window on the life and work of George W. Carver on the Moses Carver farm. The three small creeks, known as Carver, Williams, and Harkins, which are a tributary of Shoal Creek and which are currently considered noncontributing features, may have served as one of the natural areas where Carver collected his stones, pebbles, flowers, and insects.¹⁶⁷ These natural areas should be redesignated as contributing resources for the monument. Although it appeared that the spring was tied to Carver's washing and cooking duties, it is not without reason to suspect that Carver may have also used water from the three small creeks on occasion. The Carver cemetery, which was set aside by Moses and Susan Carver for use as a small family burial plot in the 1830s and currently comprises one-tenth of an acre in the southeast quarter of Section 7 of Township 26-N, Range 31-W, is also linked to Carver's childhood. Specifically, Carver referenced the historic feature in his circa 1897 biographical sketch.¹⁶⁸ It should be noted, however, that the cemetery headstones currently on display are replicas, and the surrounding stone fence is not original to Carver's time.¹⁶⁹ Although the Moses Carver late period dwelling is considered an extant historic resource, it is important to realize that the link to Carver is peripheral at best. Evidence pertaining to Carver's visits to the Moses Carver farm after circa 1876 was sparse, and the one documented visit, in the fall of 1884, may have only been for a short period.¹⁷⁰ In addition, there was no proof that Carver stayed with Moses and Susan Carver in the farmhouse.

The 240-acre historic landscape also serves as an important park resource. Over the course of the last several decades, the NPS has restored the landscape to the pre-settlement period, as represented by open prairie, rather than the Reconstruction-era farm on which Carver lived.¹⁷¹ As others have noted, the landscape lacks the very features that Carver would have instantly recognized, notably, actively maintained crops, livestock, and open pasture.¹⁷² Although some vegetation has been reintroduced, such as walnut trees for a fence row near the cemetery, the landscape does not include cultivated fields of Indian corn or Irish potatoes, livestock such as horses, swine, and sheep, or a large walnut or apple orchard.¹⁷³

On October 20, 2004, Peter Duncan Burchard interviewed John Hope Franklin on the contributions of George W. Carver. Franklin was a historian, former president of the American Historical Association, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and author of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947), one of the pioneering studies of the

¹⁶⁷ NPS, *Cultural Landscapes Inventory 2010*, 35.

¹⁶⁸ "A Sketch of His Early Life Written by George W. Carver in 1897 or Thereabouts for Mrs. W. A. Liston and Miss Etta M. Budd," Reel 1, Frame 0007, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁶⁹ John Harrington, Susan Haswell, Evelyn Howell, and Arnold Alanen, "Springs of Genius: An Integrated Management Plan for George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri," February 1999, 66, prepared for the National Park Service, Midwest Region, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison. The original cemetery headstones are currently stored in the park's museum collections.

¹⁷⁰ Hersey, *My Work Is That of Conservation*, 17.

¹⁷¹ NPS, *Cultural Landscapes Inventory 2010*, 48.

¹⁷² John Harrington et al., "Springs of Genius," 69.

¹⁷³ NPS, *Cultural Landscapes Inventory 2010*, 48.

African American experience.¹⁷⁴ As a young boy, Franklin had met Carver at the Oklahoma Negro State Fair in 1927. Asked by Burchard to reflect on how Carver fit into the fabric of American history, Franklin, who had also known and worked with Martin Luther King Jr., W. E. B. Du Bois, and Thurgood Marshall, observed that Carver brought a sense of self-esteem to the South and was “able to dramatize, glamorize, and make significant the things that were not up to that point significant.”¹⁷⁵ Franklin also argued that Carver’s life was an example “of complete and utter commitment and sacrifice to an idea.”¹⁷⁶ For Franklin, this was both “noble and remarkable.”¹⁷⁷

George Washington Carver was certainly an enigma, but his early life provides one key to unlocking the mystery of this educator, humanitarian, and scientist. Yet one must tread carefully, as Carver warned future biographers “that there are many things we cannot understand, my life is probably one of the best examples of it.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Andrew L. Yarrow, “John Hope Franklin,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Dr. John Hope Franklin, October 20, 2004, Interview No. 9, Carver Birthplace Association Oral History Project, Interviews Conducted by Peter Duncan Burchard, DVD 4, Tape 7, GWCNM Library.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ G. W. Carver to Dr. L. C. Fischer, September 14, 1937, Reel 22, Frame 0021, Microfilm 17,416, The George Washington Carver Papers in the Tuskegee Institute Archives, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

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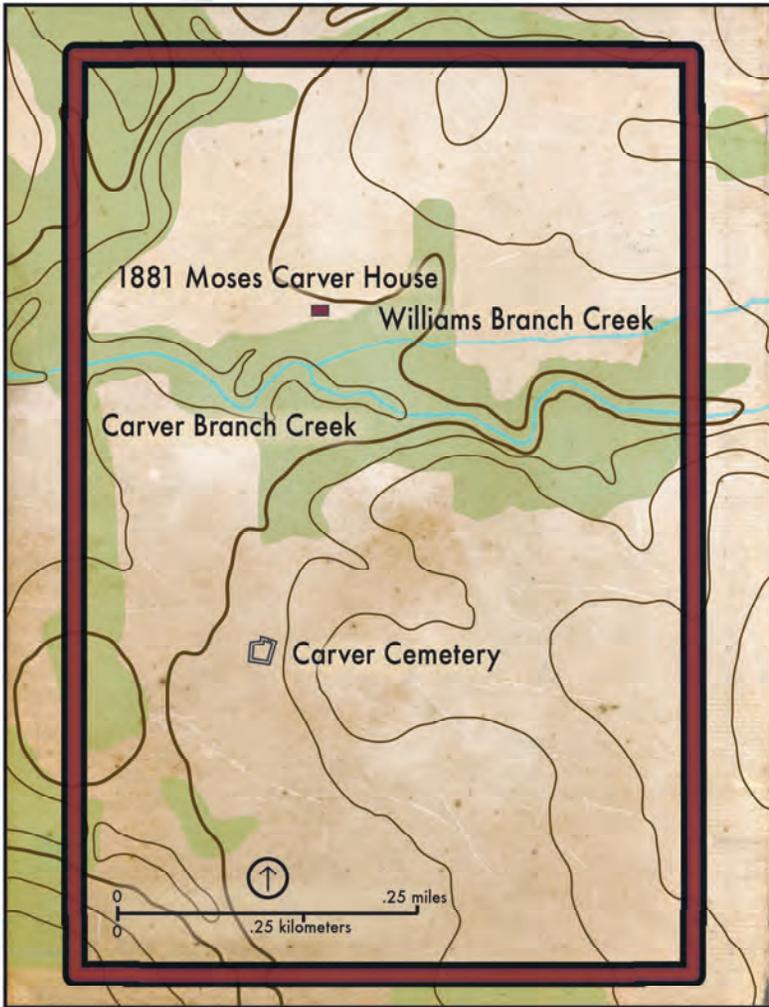
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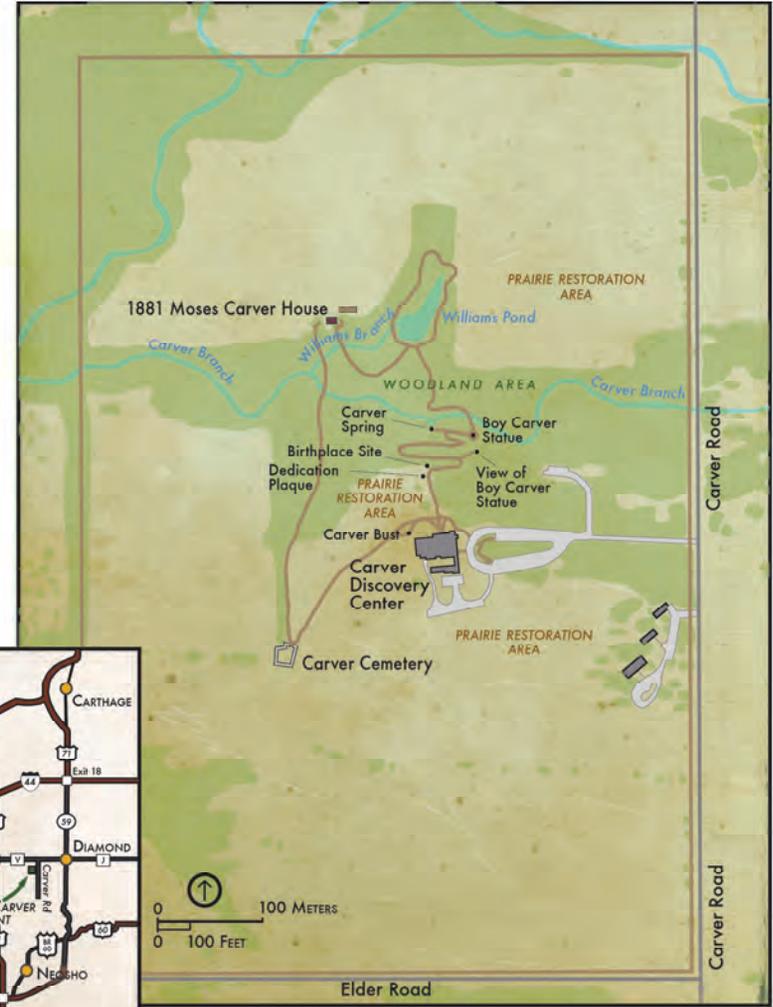
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HISTORIC CULTURAL RESOURCES, CA. 1865
 WITHIN CURRENT PARK BOUNDARIES



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