

George Washington Carver
An Innovative Life

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Kids Can Press

Thirst for education

"My soul thirsted for an education."

— George



While still in Diamond Grove, at about age 10, George began attending church. Religion was important to George throughout his life.

On the Carver farm, George learned his alphabet, and this made him want to study more. But the nearest school was for White children only, so the Carvers hired a tutor for George. Soon he was asking questions that the tutor couldn't answer.

When George was about 12 years old, Moses and Susan decided he was old enough to move to the nearby town of Neosho, which had a school for African American children. There George stayed with Mariah and Andrew Watkins, who encouraged him to attend both school and church. With Aunt Mariah's help, George became an expert at cleaning laundry.

By the time George was 13 or so, he felt he'd learned everything he could at the school in Neosho. He moved to Fort Scott, Kansas, and stayed with another family. But George was never able to earn much money there. That meant he could only afford to attend school for a week or so at a time, then he'd have to drop out.

Even worse, on March 26, 1879, George saw a crowd drag an African American prisoner out of jail and hang him. The hatred and racial prejudice George saw shocked him, and he ran away from Fort Scott. Over the next few years, he held many jobs. He was happiest when he could work with plants. Whenever possible, George went to school and moved up from grade to grade.

As George traveled, he made many friends and enjoyed writing letters to them. But while staying in Minneapolis, Kansas, George found he was receiving very few letters back. Then he discovered there was another George Carver in town, and mail was going to the wrong address. George decided to add a middle initial to make his name unique — he chose "W." One of George's friends asked if the "W" stood for "Washington." "Why not?" George replied.

George lived in Minneapolis for four years. By now, he was about 20 years old and 1.8 m (6 ft.) tall, running a successful laundry business and attending school. He moved to Kansas City, then decided to apply to Highland College, in Highland, Kansas. George was very proud when he was accepted.

But when George showed up at Highland College, he was turned down — because of his color. He never forgot this rejection.



After leaving Neosho, George moved around Kansas. He lived in Fort Scott, Olathe, Paola, Minneapolis, Kansas City and Highland.

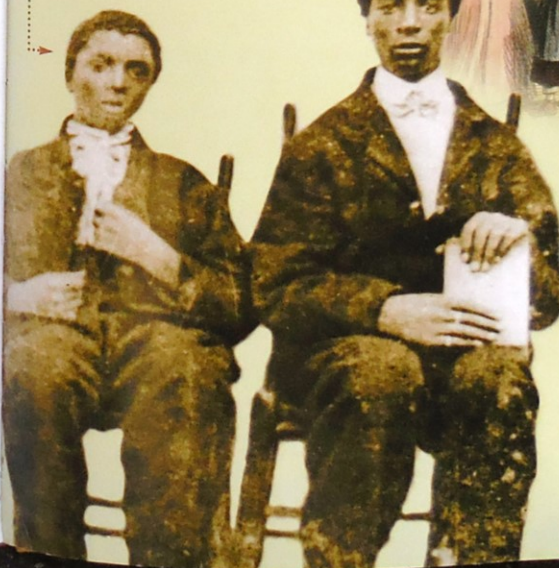


"Aunt Mariah" Watkins was a nurse and taught George how to make medicines from plants.

George's school in Neosho was just as crowded as this one. Seventy-five students were crammed into a classroom smaller than most living rooms.



George (left) saw his brother Jim for the last time in 1883 during a visit to Missouri. Shortly after George returned to Kansas, he got word that Jim had died of smallpox.



Doing laundry helped me earn my way through school.



Famous innovator

"Ninety-nine percent of the failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses."

— George



In 1935 George identified the fungi that were destroying peanut crops. The U.S. Department of Agriculture honored him for this achievement.

As the most famous Black scientist of his time, George continued to be a popular speaker with African American students. He also helped improve race relations by talking at White colleges. During the 1930s, George spoke at farmers' conferences, state fairs and meetings of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He still faced racial prejudice but refused to be sidetracked by it — he preferred to work in his lab.

George kept on researching. In 1933 he discovered a surprising new benefit of peanut oil. Some women had complained that George's peanut oil lotion made their faces look fat. George thought perhaps the lotion made their skin expand as the oil's nutrients were absorbed. So he tried using peanut oil to massage a thin, weak boy. The child put on 14 kg (30 lbs.) in just a month!

Next George tried peanut oil massage on two patients with poliomyelitis (polio), a paralyzing disease. Soon one of the boys was able to walk again. Although one top doctor believed the peanut oil helped the boy, most doctors felt it was George's massage skills that did the trick. However, excitement about the new remedy led to a two-year peanut shortage!

In 1935 scientists became interested in a new subject called chemurgy. Today it's known as biochemical engineering — it focuses on finding industrial uses for farm products. George had been doing similar research for years, so now many people say he was the father of biochemical engineering.

George never got rich from his new products. He didn't think it was right to apply for patents (documents that give inventors legal rights to their inventions). George believed his discoveries were freely provided by God, so he felt it was wrong to make money from them. Other people pushed George to get patents, but he obtained only three: one for a cosmetic and two for paint products.

By 1938 George was more than 70 years old and had been at Tuskegee for 40 years. That year he became very ill with pernicious anemia. This blood disease is caused by the stomach's failure to absorb vitamin B₁₂. Doctors were afraid George might die. But they tried a new treatment and he was soon back in his lab.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was paralyzed with polio in 1921. George sent him peanut oil in 1933, and the president felt it helped his symptoms.



The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to 1939. Millions of Americans had no work and people were starving. George spoke out about the need to feed families cheaply.

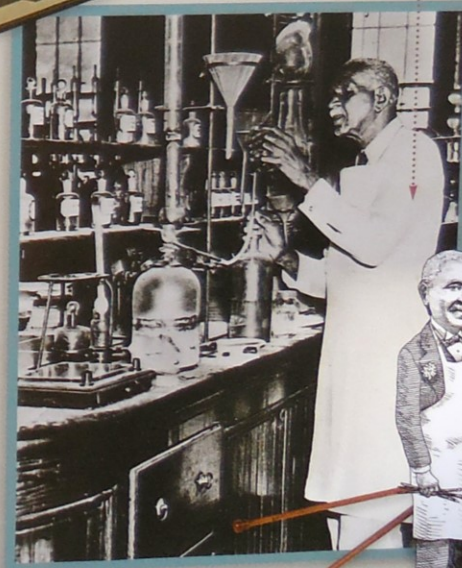
Signs like this one from a bus station were common in George's time. They segregated White people from Black people.



In 1938 the movie *The Story of Dr. Carver* was made. Two years later, George played himself in the movie *George Washington Carver*. Here's George in his lab at about this time.



In the 1940s, a small cosmetic company named Carvoline was formed. It made products such as this hair cream George created from peanuts.



When I had time to relax, I still enjoyed knitting and painting.

