GEORGE W. CARVER
1861-1943
AGRICULTURAL
SCIENTIST

George Washington Carver was born near Diamond, Missouri to Moses and Susan Carver about 1861. George and his mother were slaves on the Moses Carver farm. There are many stories about his childhood. Most believe he and his mother were kidnapped and taken to Arkansas by night riders during the Civil War. The story is often told that George was just an infant when he and his mother were stolen by night riders. After a long search, George was found. George was traded back to the Carvers for a race horse as ransom. When he returned he had whooping cough. This kept him sickly and prevented him from hard labor like other slaves. He spent lots of time in the woods talking to the flowers. Because of his illness his chores were cooking, and sewing. George did love to work in the garden, and he became very interested in plants. He spent much of his time wandering in the nearby woods collecting flowers and plants.

After the Civil War, he and his brother James continued to live on the Carver plantation, where he taught himself to read. Carver had a strong desire to seek an education. At the age of ten, he left the Carver farm to attend school in Kansas. To support himself, he worked as a farmhand, a cook, and a laundry helper. Carver finished high school and tried to enter Highland University. He was refused entry when it was learned that he was black. Carver wanted an education badly. Finally, at the age of 30, Simpson College in Iowa accepted him. He supported himself by ironing clothes for fellow students.

After a year at Simpson College, Carver was accepted at the college now known as Iowa State University. He began his studies in plant and farm science. In 1896, Carver was the first black American to graduate from this school. His thesis was based on the amaryllis plant. Because he was such a good student, he was made an instructor. Although Carver taught others, he continued to complete his studies with plants and soil at Iowa State. Carver conducted important investigations into several varieties of fungus that were attacking wheat, soybeans, oats, blackberries, and maple trees. Within two years, Carver received his Master's degree.

Because of Carver's wonderful work, he was offered many jobs. In 1896, he accepted the invitation of Booker T. Washington to teach at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He worked at this famous Black college for the rest of his life. George Washington Carver wanted to help his people.

At Tuskegee, Carver developed a system of crop rotation. He planted a legume crop (such as peanuts, which replenish minerals in the soil) one year, followed by a crop of cotton the next year. The purpose of crop rotation was to keep the soil rich and improve the harvest. This system became so successful that an oversupply of peanuts resulted. Carver also came up with more than two dozen uses for the peanut. Soon, farmers were making more money raising peanuts than harvesting cotton.

Carver is most known for his knowledge of plant chemistry and studying the over 300 uses of the peanut, sweet potato, soybean, and clay in the South. Carver received many awards in his lifetime. Although he received these awards, his life goals never changed. He wanted to make useful products from common things. Even though he was famous, George Washington Carver remained a simple and religious man. He never married. Money and other things did not mean much to him. Carver gave his entire life savings, over $30,000 to science. Carver died January 5, 1943, of anemia, at Tuskegee Institute.

This great black American is recognized as one of the finest scientist the world has ever known. His birthplace in Diamond Grove, Missouri is now a national monument. The first commemorative stamp was issued on Jan 5, 1948 and postmarked 9:00 A.M in Carver's honor by the United States Postal Service. In 1973,George Washington Carver was the second Black American to be elected to the New York University Hall of Fame.

Works Cited

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Stamp on Black History

Stamp on Black History Home Page Menu