

George Washington Carver

Agricultural Chemist , Researcher and Educator

(c. 1861—1943)

George Washington Carver was born c. 1861 near Diamond, Missouri in Newton County about 60 miles west of Springfield. He was born a slave on the plantation of Moses Carver. In a 1922 sketch, Carver wrote, "I was born in Diamond Grove, Missouri, 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." Carver's father died in a log-rolling accident and his mother was kidnapped in a raid during the civil war. His intelligence was evident as a child but since he was black, he was not allowed to attend the local school. After the civil war he left home in 1877 to study in a school for blacks in nearby Neosho. He worked odd jobs while pursuing basic education in Missouri, Kansas and Iowa. He eventually ended up in what is now Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa where he graduated with a masters degree.

Carver accepted an offer to establish an agricultural school and experiment station at Tuskegee Institute, a black college in Alabama. At Tuskegee, his research perfected the concept of "crop rotation" by demonstrating that alternating cotton with nitrogen fixing legumes (peas and beans) maintained the quality of the soils. In 1932, an article in *American Magazine* solely credited Carver with increasing peanut production and developing important new peanut products that transformed Southern agriculture. Reprinted in the *Reader's Digest* in 1937, the article boosted his soaring popularity as a scientific wizard. Backed by automobile manufacturer Henry Ford and inventor Thomas Edison, Carver became the unofficial spokesman of the chemurgy movement of the 1930s that utilized chemistry to discover non-food uses for agricultural surpluses.

Impact

Carver perfected the concept of crop rotation thus enabling the restoration of soil fertility and transforming Southern agriculture.

Through his research on peanuts, as well developing many uses and products from them, Carver virtually created an over half billion dollar industry from scratch.

Awards, recognitions and legacy

2005 American Chemical Society dedicated the agricultural chemistry of George Washington Carver a National Historic Chemical Landmark.

1998 Second Carver stamp (32¢) issued.

1990 Inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

1952 Polaris submarine George Washington Carver launched.

1952 Selected by Popular Mechanics as one of 50 outstanding Americans.

1948 First day sale of three-cent Carver Commemorative Stamp.

1943 Birthplace was established as the George Washington Carver National Monument.

1942 Birthplace marker in Diamond, MO authorized by Missouri governor.

1942 Erection of George Washington Carver Cabin, at The Henry Ford.

1941 Honorary Degree, University of Rochester.

1941 Award of Merit by Variety Clubs of America.

1939 Honorary Membership, American Inventors Society.

1939 Roosevelt Medal for Contributions to Southern Agriculture.

1928 Honorary Degree, Doctor of Science from Simpson College.

1920 Invited to be a guest speaker for the United Peanut Association of America.



1. George Washington Carver, 1897 or thereabouts, George Washington Carver Papers, Tuskegee Institute Archives, reel 1.
2. Carver, A Brief Sketch of My Life, *ibid.*
3. Linda McMurry, George Washington Carver: Scientist & Symbol (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 9-10.
4. "George Washington Carver: Chemist, Teacher, Symbol," produced by the National Historic Chemical Landmarks program of the American Chemical Society in 2005.
5. Linda McMurry, George Washington Carver: Scientist & Symbol (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 306.
6. Gary Kremer, ed., George Washington Carver: In His Own Words (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 1987), pp. 159, 161.
7. George Washington Carver, How to Build Up Worn Out Soils, Tuskegee Experiment Station, Bulletin Six (Tuskegee, 1905), p. 4.