

George Washington Carver

One night in 1864, on a farm in Missouri, a slave named Mary was caring for George, her sick baby. Suddenly slave raiders galloped onto the farm and rode away with them. Moses Carver, the farmer who owned Mary, asked a neighbor to search for her and her son. About a week later the neighbor returned with George, but George's mother was never found.

Moses and his wife Susan raised George as a member of their family. George was not strong enough to assist in the fields, so he helped Susan with her household chores and her garden. Fascinated by plants, he developed a talent for taking care of them. He became so good at nursing sickly plants that he became known in the area as "the plant doctor."

George was eager to go to school, but the nearest school for black children was in Neosho, a town eight miles away. When he was 12, George left the Carvers, taking their last name as his own, and walked to Neosho. After living there for a year, he had learned all that the one-room school could offer. Anxious to learn as much as possible, he moved on. For the next three years, he traveled from town to town, attending schools and finding work. By 1880 he was living in Kansas where he set up a small laundry business and attended high school.

When he was in his mid-20s, Carver enrolled at Iowa State College to study science and pursue a career in agriculture. He completed a master's degree there in 1896. That same year, Carver moved to Alabama. He had been invited to become the head of the new department of agriculture at Tuskegee Institute. His responsibilities included teaching, directing crop and soil experiments, and giving agricultural advice to farmers in outlying areas. Carver was particularly concerned about the **plight** of poor black farmers. To help these farmers, he held conferences and wrote easy-to-read booklets on such topics as inexpensive farming methods and meals to cook for good nutrition. He even designed and equipped a wagon, called the Jesup Wagon, which could be driven to rural areas for demonstrations.

Most of these **impoverished** farmers worked on land that had been worn out by planting cotton year after year. Carver advised them to plant peanuts, a food rich in protein and a crop that would put minerals back into the soil. Many farmers followed his advice, but there was a limited market for their peanuts. Carver realized that he had to increase the demand for this crop. He worked long hours in his laboratory and, in time, developed over 300 products made from peanuts including cooking oil, shaving cream, printer's ink, candy, and soap.

Although Carver's work with peanuts brought him national fame, he remained at Tuskegee, living in two small rooms. He had no interest in acquiring possessions or gaining personal wealth. "These mean nothing," he said. "It is simply service that measures success."

