

"Received of Moses Carver Seven Hundred Dollars in full consideration for a Negro girl named Mary age about thirteen who I warrant to be sound in body and mind and a slave for life."

This stark statement from a bill of sale for his mother is the first recorded fact directly related to the life of George Washington Carver.

Late in the 1830s Moses Carver and his wife Susan migrated from the eastern United States and settled on 97 hectares (240 acres) in southwestern Missouri near the small community of Diamond Grove. Moses was a good farmer and the land provided an abundant living, but the Carvers, having reared two nephews and a niece, were growing old alone with no children of their own to help with the chores. So Carver made the decision to become a slaveholder, and the black girl named Mary from the neighboring farm had a new home.

In time Mary had several children. Her second son was named George, but his birthdate was not recorded. In later years, Carver said, *"as nearly as I can trace my history, I was about two weeks old when the war closed. . . ."* He usually gave 1864 or 1865 as his year of birth, but some historians have placed it as early as 1860.

Just five and one-half years after Mary came to the Carvers, civil war erupted and forever changed the lives and fortunes of the peaceful farm couple, their slave, and her children. The Civil War brought an end to slavery in America, but in the process it also brought strife and suffering to the people of western Missouri. In the wake of battles and troop movements came renegades and outlaws commonly called bushwackers and led by men like William Quantrill. They claimed allegiance to one side or the other, whichever was convenient at the moment, but in fact they preyed on the hapless and helpless farmers on the Missouri-Kansas border who suffered grievously from their peculiar brand of warfare.

A short time after George's birth, the Carver farm was raided by the bushwackers. They took everything of value, including Mary, George, and probably a sister. George's older brother Jim, who

was about six years old, escaped by hiding in the fencerow. The raiders headed south. Moses asked John Bentley, a soldier in a small Union contingent garrisoned in the area, to track them down and recover the mother and children. Bentley succeeded in recovering the baby George, who had been abandoned in Arkansas. The Carvers never heard of Mary again. Moses gave John Bentley one of his fine horses for his effort.

Now the Carvers were thrust into the role of foster parents. They were, in fact, the only parents the little orphaned boy ever knew. His father, a slave on the neighboring farm, had been killed in a logging accident shortly after George was born. The kidnapping ordeal had left George near death, and for some time he did not fully regain his health. His work on the farm consisted of the lighter chores around the house helping Susan Carver, while Jim worked in the fields with Moses.

The self-sufficient life of the small farmer and his prudent style of living made a lasting impression on George, and he called on those skills and values the rest of his life. Ample leisure time existed and George spent many hours outdoors observing, collecting, and thoroughly enjoying the marvels of the countryside. In later life he wrote: *"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, as it was considered foolishness in that neighborhood to waste time on flowers. . . . Rocks had an equal fascination for me and many are the basketfull that I have been compelled to remove from the outside chimney corner of that old log house, with the injunction to throw them down hill. I obeyed but picked up the choicest ones and hid them in another place. . . ."*

Instilled with the perception of a naturalist and the inquiring spirit of a scientist, young George began a search for knowledge. *"I had an inordinate desire,"* he wrote, *"for knowledge, and especially music, painting, flowers, and the sciences, algebra being one of my favorite studies."*

The Carvers encouraged him in his desire for learning, but it was not easy, for the only school in the neighborhood did not admit blacks.



About The Park

From either Neosho or Carthage, take U.S. 71. Alternate to the town of Diamond. Go west 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) on County Highway V and then south about 1.5 kilometers (1 mile).

A self-guiding trail starts at the visitor center and winds along the stream and through the same woods and fields that Carver walked as a boy. On this 1.2 kilometer (³/₄ mile) trail are: the old walnut "hanging tree," from which, according to legend, Moses Carver was suspended by his thumbs by Civil War guerrillas; the birthplace cabin site; the Robert Amendola statue of the boy Carver; the historic spring; the relocated Moses Carver dwelling, dating back to the 1880s; and the rock-walled Carver family cemetery.

Picnic facilities are limited and camping is not permitted on the park grounds.

While every effort has been made to provide for your safety, there are still hazards which require your alertness and vigilance. Poison ivy abounds in the area; learn to identify it.

George Washington Carver National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The superintendent may be reached at Box 38, Diamond, MO 64840.

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