

Tuskegee Institute

National Historic Site
Alabama

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



“In Industry the Foundation Must Be Laid”

In his famous Atlanta Address of 1895, Booker T. Washington set forth the motivating spirit behind Tuskegee Institute. In a post-Reconstruction era marked by growing segregation and disfranchisement of blacks, this spirit was based on what realistically might be achieved in that time and place. “The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now,” he observed, “is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera house.” Because of Washington’s extraordinary ability to work within the system and to maximize the possible, Tuskegee flourished to an extent only dreamed about when he met his first students on July 4, 1881.

The school’s beginnings were indeed inauspicious. At the urging of Lewis Adams, a former slave, and George W. Campbell, a former slave owner, the State of Alabama had provided \$2,000 for teachers’ salaries but nothing for land, buildings, or equipment. Classes began in a dilapidated church and shanty. Although the 30 students in the first class may not have known what to expect from the new school, Principal Washington knew exactly what he intended to do. Guided by the model of Hampton Institute, Washington set three objectives for Tuskegee. Students in the first class already had some education and showed potential as teachers. Throughout the school’s history, many graduates became educators. Washington urged these teachers “to return to the plantation districts and show the people there how to put

new energy and new ideas into farming as well as into the intellectual and moral and religious life of the people.” A rural extension program took progressive ideas and training to many who could not attend classes on the campus. Smaller schools and colleges founded and taught by Tuskegee alumni sprang up throughout the South, and teacher training remained a primary objective of their alma mater.

A second and perhaps more famous objective was to develop craft and occupational skills to equip students for jobs in the trades and agriculture. The needs of the school provided a ready laboratory for instruction. Buildings were needed, so the students made and laid bricks. Hungry students ate the products of the school’s farm, acquiring in the process a knowledge of progressive agricultural methods. Thus they learned by doing while earning compensation toward tuition. Even in traditional academic courses, practical problems were interwoven at every opportunity. “In industry the foundation must be laid,” Washington explained. Industrial education was to be the basis on which “habits of thrift, a love of work, ownership of property, [and] bank accounts,” would grow.

As a third objective, Washington hoped to make Tuskegee what he called a “civilizing agent.” Education was to be total; certainly it would occur in the classroom and workshop, but also it would

take place in the dining hall and dormitories. Washington insisted on high moral character and absolute cleanliness for both students and faculty. Dormitory rooms and table manners were critically scrutinized. Washington himself kept close watch over the appearance of Tuskegee’s buildings, grounds, students, and faculty. “I never see a filthy yard that I do not want to clean it...or a button off one’s clothes, or a grease-spot on them or on a floor, that I do not want to call attention to it,” confessed Washington. To enable the Institute to undertake such a program of total instruction, the school moved, in 1882, to 100 acres of abandoned farm land, purchased with a \$250 personal loan from the treasurer of Hampton.

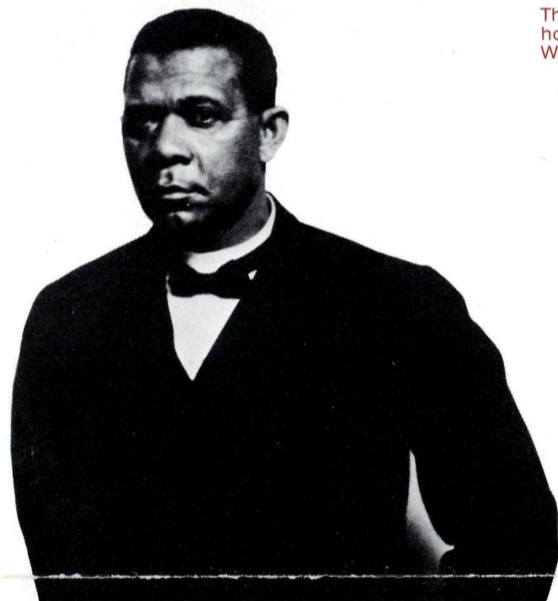
Tuskegee prospered as it did in part because Washington won widespread support in both the North and South. He traveled extensively and spoke convincingly, making the Institute known and respected among people of wealth and influence. The first building erected on the campus, Porter Hall, was named for the Brooklyn donor of \$500. Andrew Carnegie, Collis P. Huntington, and John D. Rockefeller were among the benefactors whose names appeared on major campus buildings. By the time of Washington’s death in 1915, Tuskegee had become an internationally famous institution. The main campus has since grown to include 161 buildings on 268 acres and an academic community of nearly 5,000 students, faculty, and staff.

The success of Tuskegee has not always been greeted with acclaim. Many felt that vocational training for blacks would tend to keep them in a subordinate role. Instead, greater emphasis on traditional higher education was advocated, notably by W.E.B. DuBois. While each side in this debate recognized the need for both kinds of education, the concern was with the disproportionate emphasis on vocational training that Washington’s approach and Tuskegee’s popular success were fostering. Growing racial discrimination heightened the urgency of the debate. Although Washington combated racial injustice behind the scenes, his critics knew little or nothing of his activity and criticized what they saw as inaction.

In the decades after Washington’s death, Tuskegee moved into a new era. The controversy over educational philosophy diminished as a more balanced approach arose. Washington’s successor, Robert Russa Moton, led Tuskegee into a college degree-granting program with the establishment of the College Department in 1927.

The struggles and triumphs of those early years, the support and attention that was garnered for Tuskegee, its survival and growth, combine into a fascinating, spirited saga. History will always grant a special significance to the name Tuskegee Institute.

Booker T. Washington



The Oaks, student-built home of the Booker T. Washington family.



Booker T. Washington with Theodore Roosevelt during his visit to Tuskegee Institute in 1905.



Washington with his wife Margaret and his children Ernest Davidson, Booker T., Jr., and Portia M.

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, a 6 year old child who would later call himself Booker Taliaferro Washington was a slave valued at \$400.00 on the small tobacco farm of James Burroughs in Virginia. Freed at the close of the war, Booker and his family migrated to Malden, West Virginia, where the child went to work in the mines. His spare moments were spent learning to read. While serving as a houseboy, he received strict indoctrination in the virtues of hard work and cleanliness from Viola Ruffner, wife of a mine owner. At 16, Booker entered Hampton Institute, worked his way through as a janitor, and graduated in 1875 with honors and a definite perspective on life. After periods of teaching at Malden and further study at Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C., he returned to Hampton in 1879 to teach Native American students.

Washington’s great life work really began in 1881 when he went to Tuskegee, Alabama, to create the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Pragmatic, optimistic, and energetic, Washington was a man eminently in tune with his time, and he guided the development of Tuskegee with considerable success. By the

time he made his Atlanta Exposition speech in 1895, spelling out his pragmatic philosophy of race relations in the United States, Tuskegee already held a place of pre-eminence in the field of education for blacks. The founder himself was about to become a leader of his race and advisor to presidents.

Washington’s first two wives died young. Fanny N. Smith was the mother of Portia, and Olivia A. Davidson, Washington’s assistant and a tireless fund-raiser, was the mother of sons Booker T. and Ernest Davidson. Margaret James Murray, his third wife, served effectively for many years as Tuskegee’s Director of Industries for Girls. The family home, “The Oaks,” played an important role in Washington’s life. There guests were frequently entertained, and there he returned eagerly from his extensive travels to the welcome of his beloved family. Washington died at The Oaks in 1915, as did his wife 10 years later.

George Washington Carver



Brown Brothers Sterling PA

“My very soul thirsted for an education. I literally lived in the woods. I wanted to know every strange stone, flower, insect, bird, or beast.”

Born a slave of Moses and Susan Carver, probably during the Civil War, George Washington Carver had a burning desire for education that was fed by a strong natural curiosity. In childhood his health was poor, and he was orphaned at an early age. Yet he worked his way through school and earned a master’s degree in agriculture from Iowa Agricultural College, later Iowa State. Upon graduation, he joined the faculty at Iowa where he supervised research in botany and bacteriology. He was well on the way to a promising scientific career.

In 1896, however, Carver chose a much less certain future by accepting Booker T. Washington’s invitation to come to Tuskegee Institute as head of the new Department of Agriculture. Here, for 47 years, Carver taught, wrote, and worked in his laboratory. His scientific ability, reinforced by his love of nature and God, his basic curiosity, and his desire to help his fellow man, led him



Left: George Washington Carver with Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The George Washington Carver Museum.



Carver with students in his laboratory-classroom, about 1903.

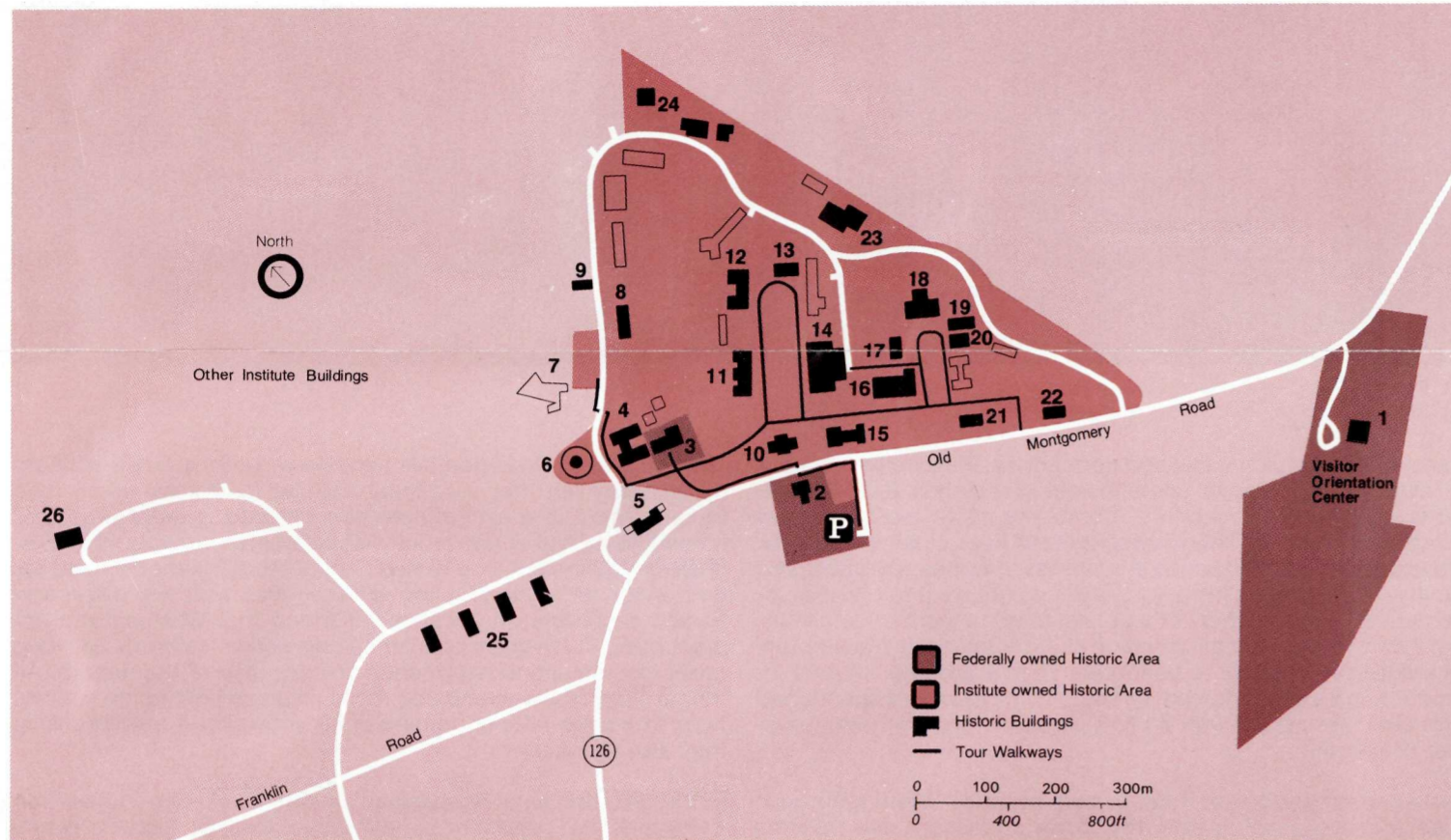
to develop numerous uses for Southern agricultural products. His work brought fame and honor to Tuskegee Institute, and won him a reputation as an outstanding American scientist.

In 1938, the Institute honored Carver by establishing the George Washington Carver Museum on the campus. Here Carver, who was also talented in the arts, found a home for his paintings and needlework, his vegetable specimens, and his samples of products derived from peanuts, sweet potatoes, sand, and feathers, to name a few. The museum was dedicated on March 11, 1941, at a ceremony attended by Henry Ford, who came to pay tribute to the aging professor-scientist. Carver lived at Tuskegee until his death on January 5, 1943. His legacy lives on in the museum and in the Carver Research Foundation, which was begun with a bequest from Carver himself.

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Tour of the Historic Campus District

Many of the Institute buildings constructed while Booker T. Washington was alive still exist. Most are built of brick made on the campus by students. Architect R. R. Taylor, the first black graduate (1892) of MIT, and a Tuskegee faculty member, designed most of the historic buildings and supervised construction by students. The Institute has been involved in architectural training since 1893.

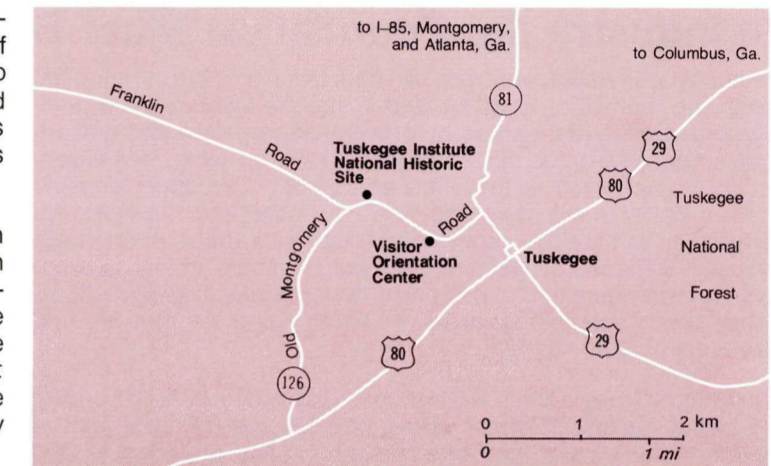
As you tour the campus, either by car or by foot, use this list to see Tuskegee's oldest buildings. The current name of each is given first, then the historic name, if different, is in parentheses, followed by an approximate date of completion.

1. Grey Columns, 1850's
2. The Oaks, 1899
3. Carver Museum (Laundry) 1915
4. Dorothy Hall (Girls' Industrial Building) 1901
5. Margaret Murray Washington Hall (Slater-Armstrong Memorial Agricultural Building) 1897, 1922
6. Statue, Lifting the Veil, 1922
7. Chapel and Graves
8. Tantum Hall, 1907
9. Little Theater (Creamery)
10. Carnegie Hall (Carnegie Library) 1901
11. White Hall, 1910
12. Douglass Hall, 1904
13. Huntington Hall, 1900
14. Tompkins Hall, 1910
15. Administration Building (Office Building) 1902
16. Collis P. Huntington Academic Building, 1905
17. Mary Scott Cottage, 1897
18. Rockefeller Hall, 1903
19. Phelps Hall (Bible Training School) 1892
20. ROTC Armory (Boy's Bath House) 1904
21. Thrasher Hall (Science Hall) 1893
22. Band Cottage (Foundry and Blacksmith Shop) 1889
23. Power Plant, 1915
24. Early Hospital Buildings, 1912-1916
25. Emery Dormitories, 1903-1909
26. Milbank Hall, 1909

Visitor Information

Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site is located on Old Montgomery Road (State Route 126) and is adjacent to the city of Tuskegee, AL. When approaching via Interstate 85, exit onto State Route 81 South. Turn right at the intersection of 81 and Old Montgomery Road. The entrance to Grey Columns is 2 1/2 blocks from this turn, on the left. Just beyond is Tuskegee Institute's campus.

We suggest that you begin your tour at the visitor orientation center at Grey Columns. There is an environmental trail system behind the mansion. Be sure to visit The Oaks, home of the Booker T. Washington family, and the Carver Museum. You may take a walking tour of the campus historic district by following the map included in this folder. While we encourage you to feel a part of the Institute's day-to-day activities, we ask you not to interfere with the students' academic pursuits or privacy. Check at Grey Columns for suggestions on what to see during your visit.

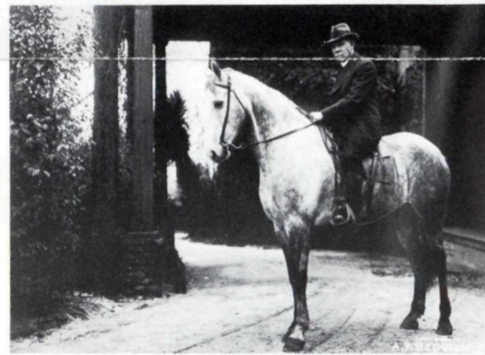


Tuskegee Album

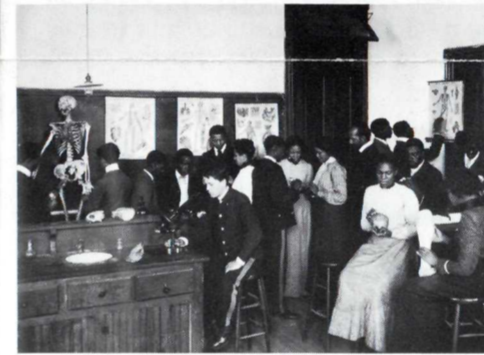


Left, above: Students in the Creamery Division learn to process butter, cream, and cheese from the large dairy herd owned by the Institute, 1913-1914.

Right: Principal Booker T. Washington, mounted on his horse, Dexter, frequently made inspection tours of the Institute's grounds.



Below: Students learn the best agricultural methods of the day while growing food for the school on the Institute's farms.



Left: Students in George Washington Carver's class study the interrelationship between the soil, plants, animals, and people.

Right: Some students learn the art of basket-weaving.

Below, right: Practicing the proper techniques for harrowing a field of onions.



Grey Columns

Grey Columns mansion, built for William Varner by slave craftsmen, exemplifies the gracious style of living that was typical of high southern society in the 1850's. The house is a fine example of Greek Revival architecture with some Italianate features. Adapted to Southern living patterns, the house has floor-to-ceiling windows and a T-shaped floor plan which allowed air to circulate freely through the rooms. This contributed to the occupants' comfort during long, hot summers. The mansion's elaborate interior was the setting for elegant entertaining in accordance with the owner's wealth and status in the community. President Theodore Roosevelt was a guest at Grey Columns when he visited Tuskegee Institute in 1905, and he was only one of many who partook of the home's hospitality over the years. Such living patterns as these, developed in a slave economy and perpetuated by sharecropping, naturally required a large and reliable work force, as well as wealth, to keep things running smoothly.



After the Civil War, the owners of Grey Columns continued to need well-trained workers to maintain their standard of living. As leading citizens of Tuskegee, the Varners were probably consulted by the founder of any new enterprise in the town, including Booker T. Washington. They realized the value of workers thoroughly imbued with the virtues of hard work, cleanliness, honesty, and sobriety, in addition to competence at their tasks. So the Varners cooperated in the building of nearby Tuskegee Institute. The educational philosophy of Principal Washington seemed well-suited to the needs of white society. A son of William Varner gave the school the old brick molds that had been used to build Grey Columns so that students could construct their own classrooms and administrative buildings. The Varners became customers for the bricks produced on the campus by students. So despite their differences, the residents of Grey Columns and the faculty and students of Tuskegee Institute worked together as they moved into the 20th century.

