

Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington
National Monument
Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

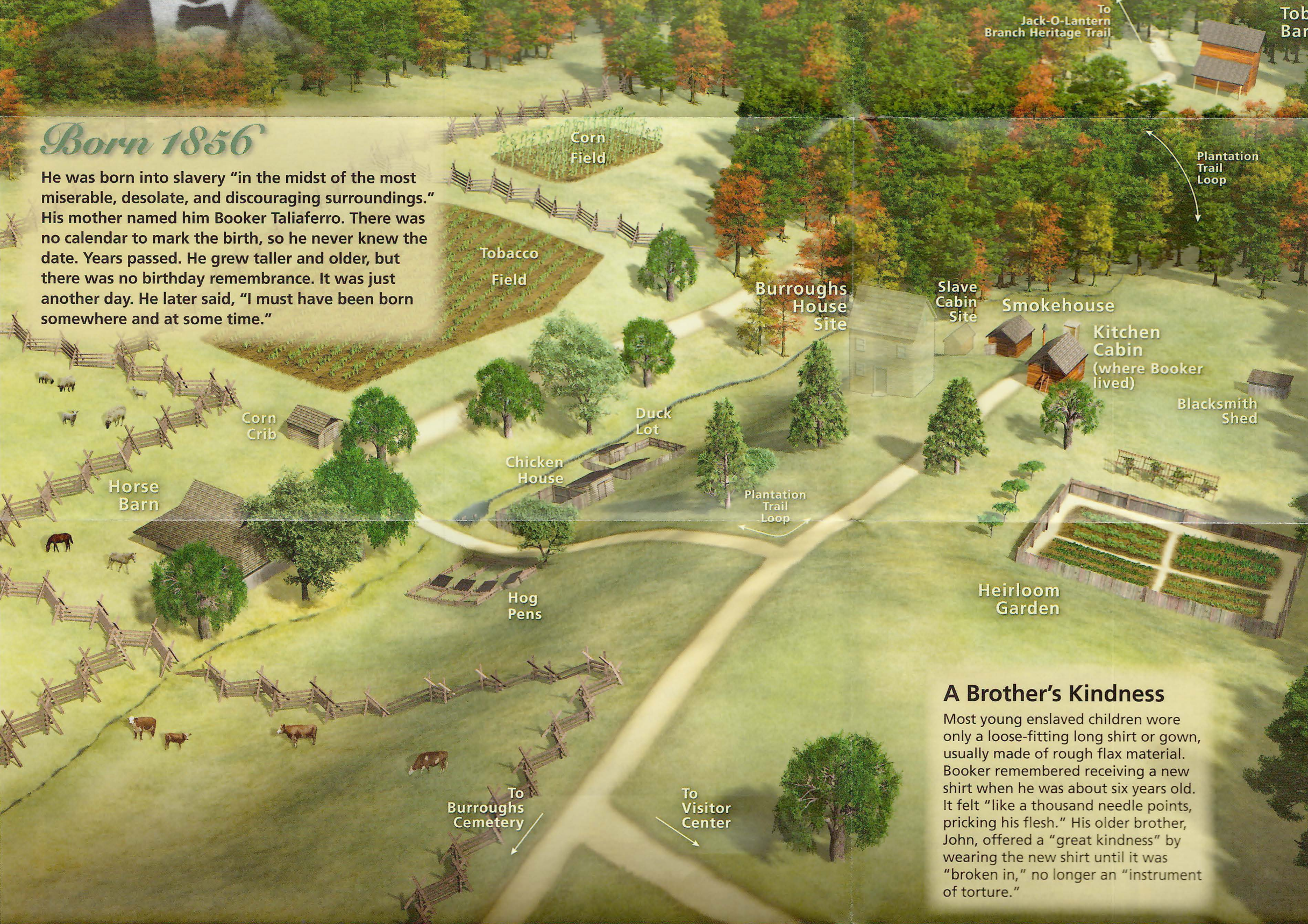


The first time I got a knowledge of the fact that my mother and I were slaves, was being awakened by my mother . . . kneeling over me . . . praying . . . that some day she and her children might be free.

—Booker T. Washington, *The Story of My Life and Work*, 1901

Born 1856

He was born into slavery “in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings.” His mother named him Booker Taliaferro. There was no calendar to mark the birth, so he never knew the date. Years passed. He grew taller and older, but there was no birthday remembrance. It was just another day. He later said, “I must have been born somewhere and at some time.”

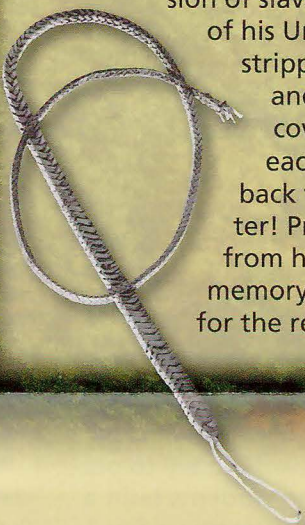


Surviving Slavery

Although Booker’s mother, Jane, was the plantation cook, she and her children often went hungry. The plantation owners rationed food for enslaved people. Booker remembered his mother sometimes woke them late at night to secretly feed them chicken. Jane knew her children were hungry and risked punishment to provide for them. The inhumanity of human bondage in America compelled enslaved Africans to survive by creative measures.

Pray Master!

Masters controlled enslaved people with fear. Many, even children, were flogged or whipped for the most trivial offense. Once a week young Booker delivered corn to the local mill. In *Up From Slavery*, he recalled, “. . . when I was late in getting home I knew I would always get a severe scolding or a flogging.” Booker’s deepest impression of slavery was the sight of his Uncle Monroe being stripped, tied to a tree, and beaten with a cowhide whip. “As each blow touched his back the cry, Pray master! Pray master! came from his lips . . .” This memory haunted Booker for the rest of his life.



Born Here, Freed Here

Booker lived with his mother, Jane, the plantation cook; his brother, John Henry; and sister, Amanda. They slept on a pile of rags on the dirt floor of the kitchen cabin. Every moment of the day was spent working to support the Burroughs family. Even as a small child Booker cleaned the yards, carried water to the men in the fields, and took corn to the mill. As an adult he said, “from the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour.”

There was no mealtime. Booker and his family never sat down at a table together. Instead, he said they got a piece of bread here and a scrap of meat there—“much as dumb animals get theirs.” When he was older he fanned flies away from the Burroughs’ table while they dined. He saw the bounty of their meals, so different from what he ate. He listened to their conversation and learned what was going on outside the plantation.

He longed to learn how to read and write, but it was against the law. When he carried Laura Burroughs’ books to school, he looked into the classroom. He thought that going to school would be like “getting into paradise.”

The Civil War started when Booker was about five years old. He remembered his mother kneeling over her children, praying that Mr. Lincoln and his armies would be successful so they could be free. Four years later, as the war ended, he remembered they

were called to the “big house,” where “a stranger made a speech and read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free. . . . My mother. . . leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks.”

Booker was free. His life was about to change in ways he never could have imagined.

Uncertainty and Fear

The enslaved Africans held by James Burroughs at the time of his death in 1861 are shown on this personal property inventory along with animals and household items. Their lives were filled with uncertainty and fear—of being sold and separated from their families, of daily abuse, of not having enough to eat, of living their lives based on the whims and temperament of the masters, and perhaps the biggest fear of all—the fear of never being free.

1 Negro man (Monroe)	600	00
1 Negro woman (Sophia)	550	00
1 Negro woman (Jane)	500	00
1 Negro man (Ben)	500	00
1 Negro boy (John)	500	00
1 Negro girl (Mary Jane)	500	00
1 Negro girl (Katie)	500	00
1 Negro boy (John)	500	00
1 Negro boy (Booker)	400	00
1 Negro girl (Amanda)	200	00
	\$7050	00

Booker is listed in James Burroughs’ 1861 property ledger as “1 negro boy” valued at \$400. Above: Whip.

WHIP—VIRGINIA FOUNDATION FOR THE HUMANITIES / © JEROME HANDLER. OTHER IMAGES NPS UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED.

Freed 1865

When Was He Born?

Booker was never sure of his exact birth date. Owner James Burroughs recorded the birth of a male slave on April 18, 1856. Was this Booker?

Who Was His Father?

Booker never knew his father. He heard rumors he was a white man from a nearby plantation, but that has never been verified. Recent research has documented an African American, Booker Taliaferro, listed on 1866 property tax records in the nearby Gills Creek area. It was customary to name a male child after his father. Could this formerly enslaved man be Booker’s father?



Booker T. Washington identified this cabin as the one where he was born. It was one of two slave cabins documented on the Burroughs plantation in 1860.

Tobacco and Slavery

Tobacco was the primary cash crop in Virginia. Enslaved Africans planted, cultivated, and harvested tobacco and other crops. In 1860, 2,000 pounds of tobacco were produced by enslaved labor on the Burroughs plantation.

Where plantations lacked a sufficient labor force, enslaved workers were hired from more affluent neighbors for harvesting and other tasks. This system produced a significant income for the Burroughs plantation and others before slavery was outlawed in Virginia.



A laborer gathers cut tobacco to haul to a curing barn (Kentucky, 1940).



Booker remembered wearing a long tow (rough flax) shirt, much like the child at left.

Booker T. Washington

1865 Malden: First Taste of Freedom

In 1865, Booker and his family moved to Malden, West Virginia, joining his stepfather, Washington Ferguson, who had escaped from slavery. Living in a cabin no better than the one they'd left, Booker, John, and Washington worked long days in the local salt furnace and coal mines. Although life was far from easy, the family now had choices and opportunities. Young Booker was determined to make the most of his freedom. He set out to do something he'd always wanted to do—learn to read.

He tried to teach himself about letters from *The American Spelling*



Booker's family lived in this cabin in Malden, WV.

Book (Blue-Backed Speller) his mother got for him (far right). He worked during the day, but persuaded his stepfather to let him attend school at night. As roll was called on the first night, Booker realized all the students

had at least two names, some three. He had never been called anything but Booker. He thought hard, and when the teacher asked his full name, he "calmly told him, Booker Washington."

Rather than continue in the mines, Booker went to live with and work for the Lewis Ruffner family, where he earned \$5 a month. Mrs. Ruffner taught him proper conduct and cleanliness, and encouraged him to get an education.

Booker heard about Hampton Institute, a school for African Americans.

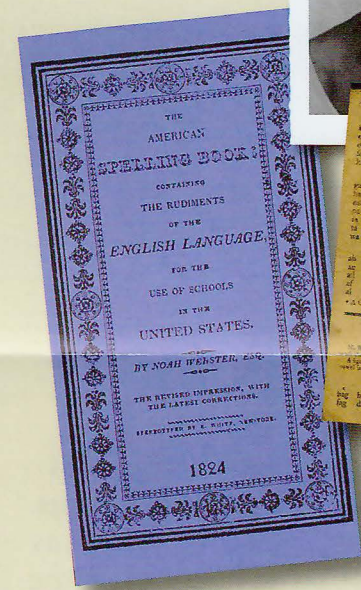


Booker learned the number "18" by writing it—the family's assigned number—on barrels he packed at the salt furnace.

He didn't know where it was and had no money to get there, but he was convinced that Hampton was the place for him. In 1872 he set out on the 500-mile journey to coastal Virginia. He walked and begged for rides, ran out of money, was tired, dirty, and hungry, but he never quit.

Booker arrived at Hampton determined to absorb all the learning he could. Little did he know how much his life would change, or ultimately how much he would change the lives of others.

In all my efforts to learn to read my mother shared fully my ambition . . . and aided me in every way that she could.



Booker attended classes at night. His first teacher in Malden was Union Civil War veteran William C. Davis (above).

1872–75 Hampton: Lessons in Leadership

When Booker arrived at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia, he had no way to pay for his schooling. But Mrs. Ruffner had taught him many things, including how to clean. He worked his way through school as the institute's janitor.

Reflecting on his schooling, Washington said, "At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labor, but learned to love labor, not alone for its financial value, but for labor's own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the abil-

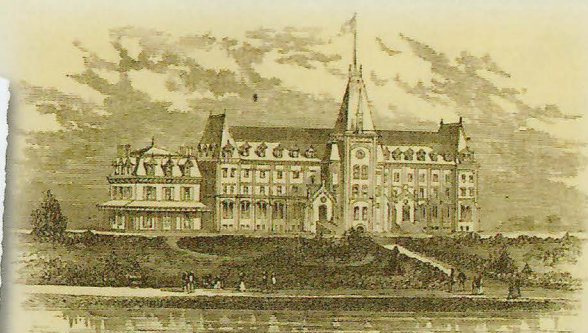


Earliest known photo of Washington, probably taken while at Hampton.

ity to do something which the world wants done brings . . . I got my first taste of what it meant to live a life of unselfishness, my first knowledge of the fact that the happiest individuals are those who do the most to make others useful and happy."

At Hampton he experienced self-reliance and self-awakening and discovered "what it meant to be a man instead of a piece of property." He recognized that others needed the same thing and resolved to devote the rest of his life to providing similar opportunities to lift others up.

Washington graduated with honors from Hampton in 1875 and returned to Malden to teach school. In 1878 he began studying at the Wayland Seminary in Washington, DC, but quit in 1879 to return to Hampton as an instructor and "house father" to 75 American Indian youths. In 1881 on General Armstrong's recommendation, he was hired to start a school in Tuskegee, Alabama.



Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton, VA.

Gen. Samuel C. Armstrong (left), founder of Hampton Institute, became Washington's (far left) mentor and friend.

SIGNATURE—MOORE AND SPRINGBORN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, MALDEN CABIN, EARLIEST BOOKER, WASHINGTON FAMILY, WIFE FANNIE, WIFE OLIVIA—NPS, SALT BARREL—© RT FACTS, YOUNG BOOKER, TUSKEGEE'S FIRST BUILDINGS—SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE, JEAN BLACKWELL HUTSON RESEARCH AND REFERENCE DIVISION, THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, GEN. SAMUEL C. ARMSTRONG, HAMPTON NORMAL AND AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE—HAMPTON UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, TUSKEGEE 1907, BOOKER T. WASHINGTON 1905—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, CORN—© AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY, STAMP—NATIONAL POSTAL MUSEUM

Our students are sent out to become a center of influence and light in showing the masses of our people . . . how to lift themselves up.

1881–1915 Tuskegee: A Legacy of Lifting Others

On July 4, 1881, Washington opened Tuskegee Normal School in a leaky-roofed shanty with 30 "anxious and eager students." The school had no land, buildings, teachers, or money. Undeterred, Washington and his students rolled up their sleeves and got to work. He borrowed money to purchase 100 acres. The students built a kiln and made bricks. Within a few years they had constructed a school building, dining hall, girl's dormitory and chapel.



Tuskegee's first buildings (above) and later in 1907.

By 1888, the 540-acre school had more than 400 students, who all labored to support the school. The curriculum focused on trades and academic subjects related to students' experiences. Emphasis was given to personal hygiene, manners, and character.

Washington worked tirelessly to gain support for Tuskegee Institute, the surrounding community, and other communities throughout the south. In

a time and place hostile to African Americans, he fought for advancement and taught self-reliance and self-determination. In 1892 he started Tuskegee Negro Conferences to seek solutions for impoverished black farmers through crop diversity and education. In 1900 he founded the National Negro Business League, encouraging black enterprises and publicizing their successes.

He did not seek national attention, but on September 18, 1895, at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, his speech to an integrated audience catapulted him from schoolteacher to the leading voice for African Americans. He advised governors, congressmen, and US presidents and secured financing from northern industrialists for black schools in the south.

Some of Washington's strategies and viewpoints differed from those of other African American leaders. It was not public knowledge at the time, but he worked behind the scenes writing letters to try to end Jim Crow laws and racial violence, and financed legal challenges to black disenfranchisement.

Washington died of kidney failure due to high blood pressure on November 14, 1915, at his Tuskegee home. He is buried on his beloved campus. Booker T. Washington was many things: for-

mer slave, husband, father, educator, author, diplomat, and statesman. He was one of the nation's most influential African American leaders. Perhaps his most enduring legacy is not what he accomplished, but what he helped others accomplish.



Booker T. Washington, ca. 1905

A Family Man



Family portrait, ca. 1895: (left to right) Ernest, Booker Jr., Margaret, Booker Sr., and Portia.

Washington married three times. He wed his Malden sweetheart, Fannie Smith, in 1882. The following year their daughter, Portia, was born. Fannie died in 1884 after falling from a wagon. In 1885, he married Olivia Davidson, assistant principal of Tuskegee. They had two sons, Booker Taliaferro Jr. and Ernest Davidson. Olivia died in 1889 from chronic lung disease. In 1893, Washington married Margaret Murray, Fisk University graduate and director of Tuskegee's programs for female students.



Fannie



Olivia

Honoring Booker T. Washington



Booker T. Washington was the first African American to receive an honorary degree from Harvard University (1896), the first on a US postage stamp (1940), the first to have a US ship named after him (1942), the first on a US coin (1946–51), and the first with a national monument in his name (1956).

Visiting the Park

Stop at the visitor center to see exhibits and an audiovisual presentation about the life of Booker T. Washington. The sales area focuses on African American history. Restrooms, picnic area with tables, trash cans, and water fountain are available.

The park is open daily 9 am to 5 pm; closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. • To reserve group tours and for weather delays and closures, call 540-721-2094.

Safety Stay on trails and check yourself for ticks. • Do not feed or pet animals.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

Firearms For firearms regulations check the park website.

Pets Keep pets on leash at all times.

Plantation Trail The ¼-mile loop trail through the plantation area includes reconstructions of 19th-century farm buildings similar to those present when Booker was a child.

Jack-O-Lantern Branch Heritage Trail Take this 1½-mile walk through fields and forests. Practice "Leave No Trace" principles so that future generations can enjoy these natural and cultural features.

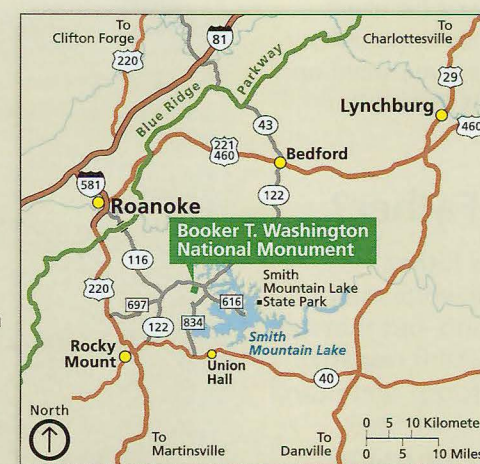
More Information

Booker T. Washington National Monument
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www.nps.gov/bowa

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