



The Award Winning

Jimmy Carter Library & Museum

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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George Washington Carter Exhibit Coming to Carter Library *Opens January 14th*

Atlanta, GA. – The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library & Museum will open a new exhibition *George Washington Carver* on Saturday, January 14th, 2012. Organized by Chicago’s renowned Field Museum, in collaboration with Tuskegee University and the National Park Service, the exhibition presents a complex and intimate portrait of one of America’s best known names – and least-studied men – George Washington Carver. It follows Carver’s entire life and career, revealing both his struggles and his remarkable achievements as scientist, conservationist, educator, and humanitarian. It brings together more than one hundred artifacts from Carver’s personal life and work, along with animated and live videos, interactive displays, a diorama of Carver’s childhood farm, and a re-creation of the Jesup wagon, his mobile classroom.

The Museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9am until 4:45 pm and on Sunday from noon until 4:45 pm. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$6 for seniors (60+), military and students with IDs. Children 16 and under are free. (The Carver exhibit is included at no additional charge) There is plenty of free parking.

Many people today know George Washington Carver largely from the myths that have grown around him...none of them true. The fact is, he didn’t invent peanut butter; it had existed in many cultures for centuries. Neither did he create 300 new products from peanuts – though he created some, and collected many others.

The truth about Carver is much more interesting than the myths. He was a man with a fascinating life story and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, who overcame tremendous odds to become one of America’s most versatile scientists. He was a trail-blazing proponent of sustainability, who believed that “nature produces no waste” and neither should man. He was a humanitarian whose primary goal was, as he put it, “to help the farmer and fill the poor man’s empty dinner pail.”

A Thirst for Knowledge

Carver’s childhood was both dramatic and protected. A frail child born into slavery, George and his mother were kidnapped by slave raiders when he was still an infant. George was abandoned by the kidnappers and rescued by his owners, Moses and Susan Carver, who adopted both George and his brother. George’s real mother was never found.

Moses was a farmer in a Missouri frontier town, a frugal man who abhorred waste of any kind. Since George was a sickly child, unable to help much on the farm, Susan taught him handiwork such as embroidery, knitting, and crocheting. George also spent a lot of his time outside, collecting rocks, observing nature, and creating a “secret garden.” His sensitivity and curiosity

were apparent, and even as a child he was known throughout the area for his remarkable skill with plants.

“I wanted to know the name of every stone and flower and insect and bird and beast. I wanted to know where it got its color, where it got its life – but there was no one to tell me,” Carver later wrote. His foster parents had no formal education, and there were no schools close to their home – only a Blue-back speller in which George found few answers to his endless questions. So at the age of thirteen he left home, with the Carvers’ blessings, to seek an education. With a rich collection of artifacts, the exhibition traces Carver’s path and passions as he worked his way through elementary and high school, through rejection and welcome, to Simpson College in Iowa, then to Iowa State University, and finally to a research and teaching position at Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University).

A Driving Vision

Given his drive and education, Carver could have become a theoretical chemist, an academic botanist, or an inventor. But that wasn’t his bent. He had decided early on that his calling was to help “the man farthest down.” On his way to Tuskegee Carver saw fields of scraggly cotton in exhausted soil and poor black farmers struggling to survive. He had what he called a “mighty vision” – of barren fields turning green with crops, whitewashed farmhouses gleaming in the sun, gardens sprouting with vegetables and flowers.

“Carver was driven by the needs he saw around him,” says Michael Dillon, chair of the Botany Department at The Field and one of the curators for the Carver exhibition. “His research was very goal-oriented.”

One of the ideas that Carver seized upon, Dillon says, was crop rotation – a practice long known to other cultures but not used in the South, where cotton truly was king. Carver understood that cotton had depleted the soil of the nitrogen that plants need in order to grow. And he knew that legumes, such as peanuts and peas, had a symbiotic relationship with bacteria that could take inert nitrogen molecules from the atmosphere and convert them into a form plants can use.

It was the desire to make these alternative crops more useful to farmers and others that led to Carver’s famous work with peanuts, cow peas or black-eyed peas, and sweet potatoes. (Sweet potatoes, though not a legume, grow easily with little or no fertilizer.) He sought many other practical solutions as well, experimenting with seeds, soil enrichment, natural fertilizers, and more.

In every aspect of his research, Carver sought to make his findings accessible to the communities around him. He put plain-language information and instructions into bulletins that were distributed widely. And he took the Jesup wagon to farms and public spaces, demonstrating farming and composting techniques, cooking, canning...even home makeovers with paints, furniture, and decorative items made from plants and minerals.

Sustainable Resources for Food, Fuel, and Much More

Carver’s ideas on conservation were ahead of their time. “I believe the Great Creator has put oil and ores on this earth to give us a breathing spell,” he said. “As we exhaust them, we must be prepared to fall back on our farms.... For we can learn to synthesize materials for every human need from the things that grow.”

Carver blazed a trail for the development of products from plants, a field known as chemurgy. He found hundreds of new uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soy beans, including milk and cheese, laundry soap and linoleum, wallboard and rubber, and much, much more. Carver

worked on biofuels with Henry Ford, and made a massage oil for polio victims – though it turned out to be the masseur, Carver himself, as much as the oil, that was effective.

After Carver, interest in plant products went out of fashion for decades – only to be rediscovered at the end of the twentieth century. Today’s accelerating research on plant-based fuels, medicines, and other products is rooted in Carver’s work – though not always with his altruism.

“The most important gift Carver gave to people wasn’t any particular product,” Michael Dillon says. “It was the gift of self-worth.” Carver crossed racial and class boundaries. He gave of himself so that others could become educated, self-sufficient, and proud. He followed his own vision to improve the lives of others.

For more information, call 404-865-7109. You can keep up with the Carter Library events on the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library page on Facebook and follow the CarterLibrary on Twitter. If you wish to unsubscribe to these news releases, simply email tony.clark@nara.gov and put “UNSUBSCRIBE” in the subject line.