

'Legacy of inspiration and encouragement:' George Washington Carver honored Monday

Mallory Prescott, Academics Reporter

Iowa State University recognized George Washington Carver Day on Monday, holding a recognition program in the Memorial Union's Great Hall.

"We celebrate Carver not just because of what he overcame and what he accomplished, but because his legacy is one of inspiration and encouragement," Dan Robison, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, said. "By having this annual Carver day in Iowa and gathering here to contemplate and to celebrate, we are helping to fulfill his admonition to do something now to make the world a better place."

Carver was born into slavery on a small farm in Missouri in the 1860s. Carver, his mother and his sister were kidnapped by their enslaver, Moses Carver.

Carver was able to grow up a free child on a farm after slavery was abolished in Missouri in 1865, where he grew a keen interest in plants and agriculture.

"Through Carver's love of nature, he wanted to figure out how to break down plants and figure out how to solve problems to help people," Jewel Bronaugh, president and CEO of the 1890 Universities Foundation, said. "And he defied the odds with his insatiable curiosity for education and a determination to learn. He would say education is the key to unlock the golden doors of freedom."

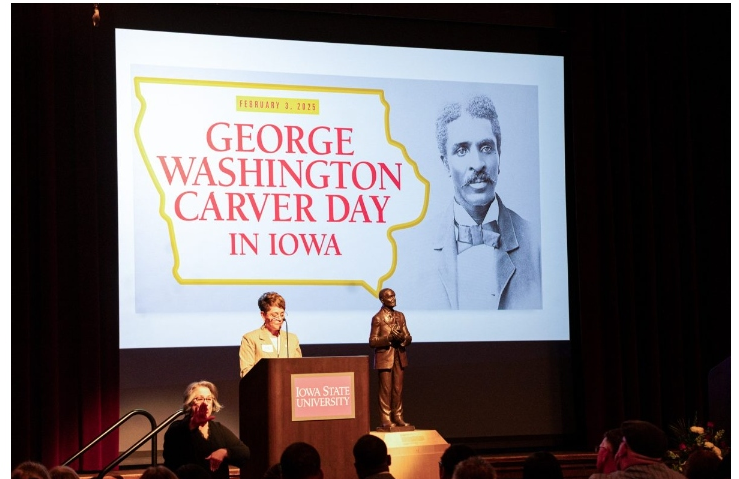
Carver was the second African American student to be accepted into Simpson College, where he studied art and piano from 1890 to 1891. He was encouraged by one of his professors to study at Iowa State University, where he was accepted as the first African American student.

Carver obtained his bachelor's degree in agricultural science in 1894 and a master of science degree in 1896. He later became a faculty member at Iowa State.

"While Carver could have continued at Iowa State, he received a letter in 1896 that would forever change his life and unlock his full purpose," Bronaugh said.

Carver was offered a position at Tuskegee University to serve as the auditor of the Act Department, overseeing two experimental farms while teaching a full load of classes.

"Nevertheless, he accepted the position, and for 47 years at Tuskegee University, he inspired countless students to pursue their education and agriculture as a pathway to uplift their families and their communities," Bronaugh said. "And he loved his students."



Anna Graf

Iowa State University host George Washington Carver Day with Jewel Bronaugh as the keynote speaker, Feb. 3, 2025, Memorial Union, Ames, Iowa.

Carver's legacy established an outreach program for poor Black farmers in the south. He devised a system of sharecropping cotton farms in the south and used the cotton industry for change.

"He had said whenever the soil is rich, the people flourish," Bronaugh said. "Whenever the soul is wanted, the people are wasted. Poor soil only produces poor people."

Carver encouraged sustainable agriculture practices, including crop rotation and the use of organic fertilizer and cover crops like peanuts and sweet potatoes.

"I ask you, if nothing else, to figure out how to use Dr. Carver as a blueprint for how to treat people," Bronaugh said. "He reminds us fear is the root of hate for others and hate will eventually destroy their hater. He sought to bridge racial divides through education and innovation."

Throughout the event, Cantamus, a select soprano, alto or treble voice ensemble, performed two different songs. The first song was the world premiere of the new Iowa State loyalty song. The second song was an argument of Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come."

The event also recognized Frederick Douglass Patterson.

Patterson, a graduate of Iowa State who majored in veterinary science, was the fourth African American student from his program.

"Dr. Patterson was an educator," Ruby Perry, Dean of Tuskegee University, said. "He was a visionary whose work redefined African American higher education."

As the third president of Tuskegee University, he expanded the institutions programs, emphasizing the technical and vocational training alongside liberal arts. Patterson also started the College of Engineering, the dietetics program and the aeronautical science program.

Patterson started the first and to date, only college of veterinary medicine at a historically black college.

To honor both legacies of George Washington Carver and Frederick Douglass Patterson, Iowa State held a poster competition. Students from across the university were invited to create a poster or a piece of artwork that illustrates Carver and Patterson's legacy.

The winners of the "I Can" Challenge:

Carver Best In Show Award: Ushashi Bhattacharjee and Tirtho Roy

The Patterson Best Show: Sirisha Puducode Parameswaran

Innovation Inspiration Poster: Jordan McDowell

Innovation Artwork Inspiration: Victoria Evans

"There's so many words that we could use to describe who the great George Washington Carver is: an agronomist, artist, educator, conservationist, humanitarian and so much more," Bronaugh said. "But we know that he was a man of hope. His life teaches us not just about scientific innovation, but he teaches us how to live life with a purpose."