

George Washington Carver High School (Flagler County Black History)

Segregated Black High Schools in the Rural South

An example of some of the rural South's laws prohibiting integrated education was Florida's Constitution of 1885 that included the clause, "...schools for white children and the schools for Negro children shall be conducted separately."

One of the major problems with the segregated black high schools in the rural South was underfunding. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision allowed city and county school boards and governing bodies to excuse the unequal distribution of funding for white versus black schools. Underfunding resulted in less qualified teachers, fewer classes offered, used and outdated textbooks, a lack of sufficient physical plant maintenance, deficient student college preparedness and in some cases no high school availability in certain geographic locations.

George Washington Carver High School (Bunnell, Florida)

Prior to the George Washington Carver High School opening in Bunnell, Florida in 1949, Flagler County's African American community had no high school to attend. The segregated black "Negro" public schools in Flagler County, prior to 1949, only went through the eighth grade. Although Flagler County had the Bunnell High School (*fig. 1*), which was in operation from the founding of the county in 1917, it was a segregated "white" public high school and African Americans were forbidden to attend.

If an African American child in Flagler County wanted to attend high school, prior to 1949, their best option was to go to Daytona Beach or St. Augustine. However, there was little financial assistance available. The Flagler County African American children that managed to attend high school outside of the county, prior to 1949, usually stayed with relatives, friends or other African American families during the school terms.

George Washington Carver High School (*fig. 2*) operated from 1949 to 1967 as a segregated "Negro" public high school. During this time, Bunnell High School, Flagler County's segregated "white" public high school, was approximately one mile away but the two schools never "officially" played one another in any team sports. In 1955, the George Washington Carver High School Girls' basketball team (*fig. 3*) won a championship playing against other black-only high schools.

In Flagler County, the black-only George Washington Carver High School closed after the 1967 school year (13 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision). Black high school students were integrated with white students at Bunnell High School, which was formally a white-only school. From the 1968 through the 1970 school year Bunnell High School served as the only high school in Flagler County. During the summer of 1970, a fire damaged the Bunnell High School building, which forced its closure.

The George Washington Carver High School (building) re-opened for the 1971 school year and all of Flagler County's high school students, black and white, attended school here (*fig. 4*) until the end of the 1974 school year. However, the George Washington Carver High School's name was changed to Bunnell High School from 1971 through 1974.

In 1974, the Flagler/Palm Coast High School was completed and the George Washington Carver High School building (now named Bunnell High School) was closed, and would not open as a high school ever again.

Gains, and Losses, with Pubic School Integration

During the struggle for civil rights, for every step forward there has been a step, or steps, backwards as well. The integration of public schools was no different as there has been both positive and negative repercussions.

Research indicates many positive results (gains) from integrated schools including: students have more equitable access to resources, are less likely to drop out, leadership skills are enhanced, critical thinking is encouraged, problem-solving and creativity skills are increased and students are more likely to enroll in college.

Some of the negative results (losses) when schools were initially integrated include the termination of many respected, talented and community-oriented black schoolteachers when black-only schools were closed, the decline of black community support and participation in integrated schools and the flight of white families from cities to the suburbs to avoid forced integration.

In Flagler County, when the George Washington Carver High School closed and all black students were transferred to the former white-only Bunnell High School sports teams were quickly integrated. However, the black community lost their respected high school band (*fig. 5*), school colors, mascot (tiger), traditional school songs, uniforms and marching routines. Many black high school teachers were terminated and not offered jobs elsewhere in the Flagler County School District. Black community support and participation in the integrated Bunnell High School was far less than it was at the black-only George Washington Carver High School, which distanced some black families from their local educational system.

George Washington Carver Community Center

After the George Washington Carver School buildings closed in 1974, deterioration and vandalism plagued the structures for the next several years. The gymnasium building was used as a community

recreation center starting in 1975 so it was minimally maintained. Around 1980, against the wishes of Flagler County's black community, all the George Washington Carver School buildings (except the gymnasium) were demolished. The razing of the George Washington Carver School buildings was a significant loss to the retention of black history in Flagler County.

In 2010, the Flagler County Commissioners threatened to close the George Washington Carver School gymnasium (which would have most likely led to its demolition). However, a community mobilization effort led to the establishment of the George Washington Community Center facility [which is now housed in the former George Washington Carver School gymnasium building] and is owned by Flagler County. The George Washington Carver Foundation, which is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization works to raise money and grant funding to support the facility.

The George Washington Community Center (*figures 6 & 7*) is located at 201 E Drain St, Bunnell, FL 32110. This facility offers community training (including a GED program), recreation and athletics with scheduled open gym hours available for the public.

Brief Biography of George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was born an African American slave on a farm near Diamond, Missouri sometime in 1864. Moses and Susan Carver, a white farming family, raised George and his brother James and taught them to read and write.

Carver was frail as a child and could not do farm work, so he was taught to sew, cook, embroider, garden, produce herbal medicines and other domestic duties. He soon developed an interest, and skills, related to increasing garden and plant health with the use of natural pesticides, soil conditioners and fungicides. Local farmers started referring to him as “the plant doctor” as he helped them improve their crop yields.

George Washington Carver's Education

Carver moved to Neosho, Missouri at age 11 to attend an all-black school where he lived with Andrew and Mariah Watkins, a childless African American couple, who he helped with household duties. Mariah was a midwife who taught Carver about medicinal herbs. At age 13, Carver moved to Kansas to pursue a better education. He survived by earning money performing domestic duties and was able to graduate from the Minneapolis High School in Minneapolis, Kansas in 1880. He then applied for admittance into the all-white Highland College in Kansas and was initially accepted, but later rejected when the college's administration learned he was black. Disappointed and frustrated, Carver did not pursue higher education until the late 1880s.

In the late 1880s, Carver was encouraged by a white family named Milholland to enroll at Simpson College (a Methodist liberal arts college that admitted all qualified students) in Indianola, Iowa. He began

studying art and piano in pursuit of a teaching career, but an astute professor, Etta Budd, encouraged him to study botany because of his interests and skills with plants and flowers.

Carver was accepted at the Iowa State Agricultural School (now Iowa State University), and in 1894 became the first African American to earn a Bachelor of Science degree at the school. Several professors recognized Carver's talents and were especially impressed with his research on the fungal infections of soybean plants, and encouraged him to stay at the school and pursue a graduate degree.

In 1896, Carver earned a Master of Agriculture degree at the Iowa State Agricultural School and received a teaching offer from Booker T. Washington¹ (*fig. 8*) at the Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama. He was instrumental in establishing an agricultural school at the Tuskegee Institute and worked here as an agricultural scientist, teacher and inventor for the rest of his life.

One of Carver's most important contributions was his idea of crop rotation. He discovered that growing cotton for many years led to the loss of soil nutrients and caused poor crop yields. He advocated the growing of nitrogen-fixing plants such as sweet potatoes, soybeans and peanuts to increase crop yields when the land was reverted to cotton after a few years.

“The Peanut Man”

Contrary to popular belief, Carver did not invent peanut butter as many stories state. However, some of his most notable accomplishments and inventions were peanut-related. He developed over 300 commercial, industrial and food products from peanuts including wood stains, various cosmetics, punches, Worcestershire sauce, cooking oils, paper, milk and soaps. Although some of his peanut-related developments found widespread usages, many others did not.

In 1921, the peanut industry was seeking tariff protection and Carver appeared before the U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, to give testimony regarding the wide range of products that derive from peanuts. He received a standing ovation and convinced the committee to approve tariff protection for peanuts. The label of “The Peanut Man” has been associated with him ever since.

George Washington Carver's Legacy

Carver's celebrity allowed him to promote racial harmony by traveling around the South. He also volunteered to train and help poor farmers on better agricultural techniques to increase their crop yields. He traveled to India to discuss nutrition in the developing world with Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.²

From 1898 to 1943, Carver released bulletins for public use, which reported on technical research findings. Additionally, these bulletins included practical applications about cultivation information for farmers, science for teachers and recipes for homemakers.

On January 5, 1943, Carver died at the Tuskegee Institute.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed legislation to honor Carver with a National Monument. The George Washington Carver National Monument (*fig. 9*) is located in Diamond, Missouri.

Other honors include: The George Washington Carver Museum at the Tuskegee Institute (dedicated in 1941), the Liberty ship *SS George Washington Carver* (launched in 1943), the USPS 3-cent postage stamp (*fig. 10*) (released in 1948), the ballistic missile submarine *USS George Washington Carver* (launched in 1965), the USPS 32-cent postage stamp (released in 1998) (*fig. 11*) and his induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame (1990).

Figures
George Washington Carver High School
(Flagler County Black History)

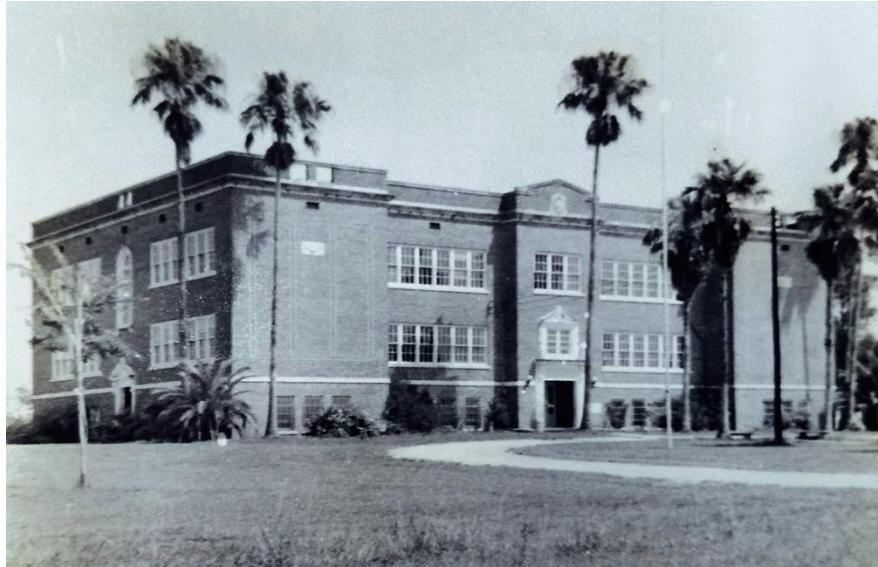


Fig. 1. The Bunnell High School building – ca. 1950. (This building is no longer extant.) Source: Flagler County Historical Society.



Fig. 2. The George Washington Carver High School building – this photograph appeared in the *Flagler Tribune* on February 27, 1958 and shows an addition that was completed. (These buildings are no longer extant.) Source: Flagler County Historical Society.

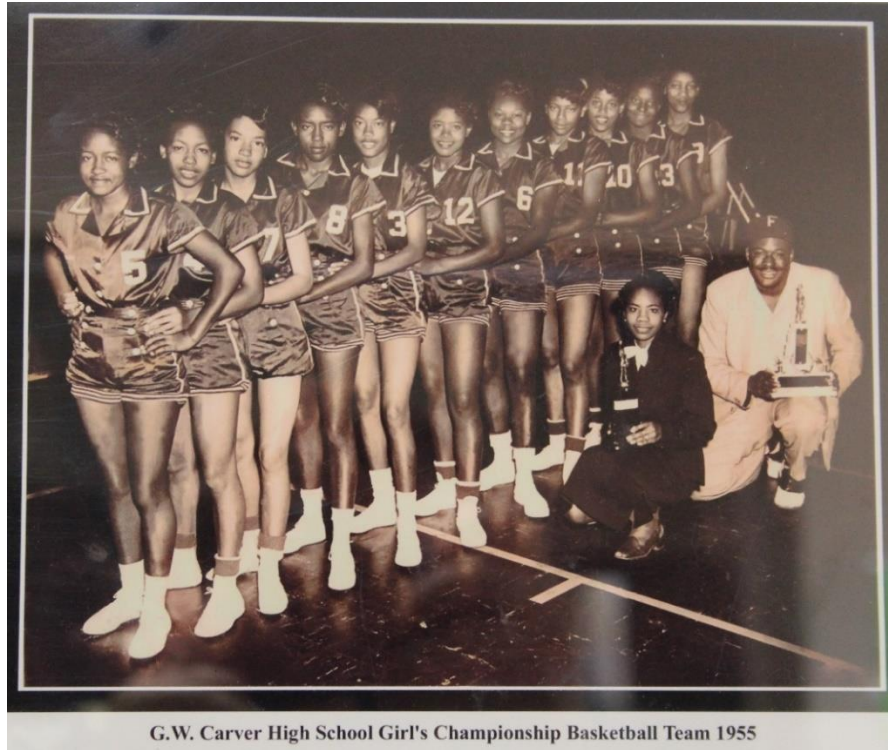


Fig. 3. The George Washington Carver High School Girls' Championship Basketball Team - 1955. Source: Exhibit at the G.W. Carver Center in Bunnell, Florida. Photograph by Author (January 2019).

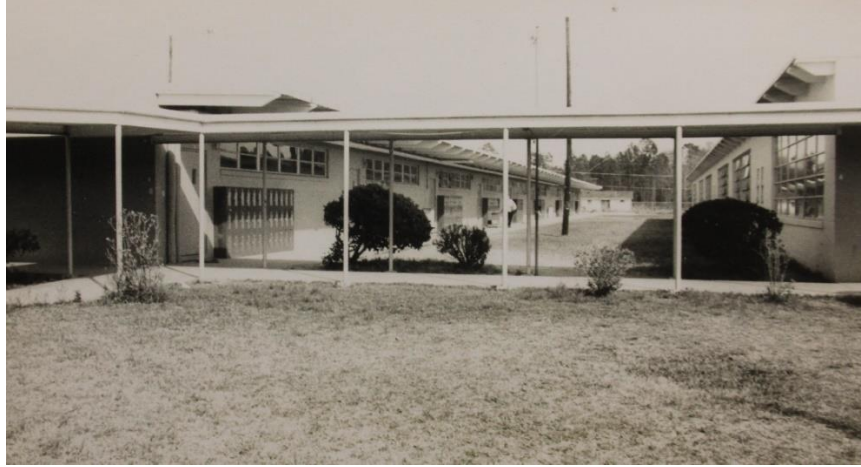


Fig. 4. View of the Bunnell High School campus (formerly the George Washington Carver High School campus) – circa 1971. (These buildings are no longer extant.) Source: Flagler County Historical Society.



Fig. 5. The George Washington Carver High School Marching Band – ca. 1950s. (The building behind the band members is no longer extant.) Source: Exhibit at the G.W. Carver Center in Bunnell, Florida. Photograph by Author (January 2019).



Fig. 6. The George Washington Carver Community Center in Bunnell, Florida – exterior view. Photograph by Author (January 2019).



Fig. 7. The George Washington Carver Community Center in Bunnell, Florida – interior view. Photograph by Author (January 2019).



Fig. 8. Booker T. Washington – USPS 10-cent Postage Stamp (released in 1940). Source: Author's Collection.



Fig. 9. George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Missouri
Source: National Park Service.

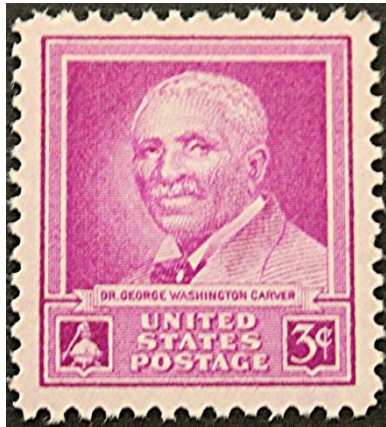


Fig. 10. Dr. George Washington Carver – USPS 3-cent Postage Stamp (released in 1948). Source: Author’s Collection.



Fig. 11. George Washington Carver – USPS 32-cent Postage Stamp (released in 1998). Source: Author’s Collection.

Notes

George Washington Carver High School (Flagler County Black History)

¹ **Booker Taliaferro Washington** (c. 1856-1915) was born into slavery and became a dominant leader in the African American community. He was an educator, author, orator and advisor to several presidents of the United States.

² **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi** (1896-1948) was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and advocate for nonviolent resistance. He led a successful campaign for India's independence from Great Britain, which inspired civil rights and freedom movements around the world.

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