



Foundation Document Overview

Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site

Alabama



Contact Information

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Purpose



TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE commemorates and interprets the educational, social, economic, and scientific accomplishments of Tuskegee Institute, its founding leaders, and its importance in African American history.



Significance

Significance statements express why Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Fueled by a dream and a grassroots campaign, Tuskegee Institute's establishment by the state of Alabama came from the effort of a former slave, Lewis Adams, and a former slave owner, George Campbell, to form a school for educating African Americans during the Reconstruction era.
- Designed, built, furnished, and operated by African Americans during a time of repression in Reconstruction-era Alabama, Tuskegee Institute became a beacon of hope for African Americans seeking to improve their condition through education and self-sufficiency.



Significance



- Drawing on his own rise up from slavery through hard work and self-discipline, Tuskegee Institute's first president, Booker T. Washington, was an African American educator, author, orator, advisor to U.S. presidents, and the dominant leader in the national African American community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For 34 years, from 1881 until his death in 1915, Washington steered Tuskegee Institute to improve the conditions of African Americans through education and entrepreneurship.
- Born into slavery and becoming a nationally renowned agricultural scientist, educator, and humanitarian, George Washington Carver established Tuskegee Institute's first agricultural department in 1896 and was one of Tuskegee Institute's most influential professors, both locally and on the national stage.
- At Tuskegee Institute, George Washington Carver's Agricultural Experimental Station and the Movable School brought education and training to the doorstep of working farmers in rural communities and then to the world, becoming an important advancement in agricultural education and training in the South.
- Tuskegee Institute's early education program began as a progressive curriculum based on vocational, agricultural, and industrial trades as envisioned by Booker T. Washington. Tuskegee University has become a leader in the fields of aerospace and chemical engineering, veterinary medicine, and bioethics, all of which continue today.

Resources and Interpretive Themes

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **House of Booker T. Washington (The Oaks)**
- **Booker T. Washington Collection**
- **George Washington Carver Museum Building**
- **George Washington Carver Collection**
- **Tuskegee Institute Collection**

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Tuskegee played and continues to play a significant role in the ascent of African Americans into mainstream America, from Reconstruction to the present.
- As the first principal of Tuskegee, 1881–1915, Booker T. Washington showcased his talents and provided a national stage for himself and other individuals associated with this institution.
- The grounds, buildings, students, and faculty at Tuskegee have fostered the resiliency of the human spirit and helped people struggling for opportunities and independence; today's leadership at Tuskegee continues this tradition.



Description

Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, 40 miles east of Montgomery, Alabama, was authorized as a unit of the National Park Service on October 26, 1974. The site preserves the legacy and associated historic structures of the historic Tuskegee Institute, a college for African Americans founded in 1881.

On July 4, 1881, 30 eager students—mostly children of former slaves—celebrated their freedom by holding their first class at the newly formed Normal School for Negroes in Tuskegee, Alabama. From its humble roots, Tuskegee grew from its initial emphasis on vocational training (most of the school's early buildings were built by its students) to the college degree-granting program that evolved into what is now Tuskegee University. Although Tuskegee Institute's history has endured for more than 130 years, the school's story is often obscured behind two of its early guiding figures—Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. As the school's first principal, Washington led Tuskegee Institute through its first 34 years. When not directing the school's growth, he traveled extensively, making Tuskegee Institute known and respected throughout the country. He eventually became a leader of his race and an advisor to presidents.

By the time Booker T. Washington died in 1915, he had made Tuskegee an internationally famous institution. In 1896, George Washington Carver accepted Washington's invitation to come to Tuskegee as head of its new Department of Agriculture. For the next 47 years, Carver taught and worked at Tuskegee and developed thousands of uses for southern agricultural products. In that role, he became widely known as an outstanding American scientist. Carver died in 1943, but his legacy lives on in Tuskegee's George Washington Carver Museum and Carver Research Foundation, which was founded with a bequest from Carver himself.

The main features of Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site are The Oaks—the house and home of Booker T. Washington—and the George Washington Carver Museum. These structures, along with an administrative office, are directly owned and managed by the National Park Service. The historic site also encompasses a 50-acre historic campus district consisting of most of the original campus buildings, all of which are owned and still actively used by Tuskegee University. Each year as many as 26,000 visitors to the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site experience the history of Tuskegee Institute through guided tours of The Oaks and the historic campus district and exhibits and audiovisual programs of the George Washington Carver Museum.

