

WPA Alabama Writers Project
LIFE HISTORIES/STORIES
Macon County

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SAW

Daddy Carver of Iuskegee

By James Saxon Childers

(A Boy who was Traded for a Horse)

Dr Carver, a product of old slave days born on the Moses Carver Plantation near Diamond Grove Mo. When 6 mos old, he + his mother were carried off by night riders. His mother was disposed of or he thought to be dying, when Moses Carver bought him back with a worn out race horse worth about \$300. Because of his youthful honesty + industry the name of "Geo. Washington" was bestowed upon him. Spent much time in woods with birds, flowers, trees or small animals.
Only one book, Webster's blue-back speller. When 10 yrs. he set out to Neosho Mo. without a cent in pocket, to get an education. Finished elementary school + managed to get to Fort Scott Mo. where, by finding odd jobs, he kept himself in high school till he finished in the early 20's! A frail boy, but over night, almost, seemed to grow into a strapping 6 footer. Made a visit back to Carvers + they presented him with his mother's old spinning wheel, which is among his most valued possessions now, at Iuskegee. He entered ^{Simpson} College at Indianola, Iowa. After paying entrance fee, had 10¢ left. Worked his way for 3 yrs + entered Iowa State College, graduating 4 yrs later (1894) taking a degree

in Agriculture. 3 mo yrs - later won Master
of Science degree. Was made one of college
faculty + Booker T. Washington there heard of
him + asked him to come to Tuskegee
on accepting this call he saw a great opportu-
nity to serve his own people in the South. He saw
small farmers overburdened by debt + saw a way to
help lift their burden. He began in 1896 to
teach his people to make "something out of nothing".
Took his students into back alleys + searched
trash piles, collecting old bottles + jars, bits of
rubber, wire + other odds + ends. Out of these
he built laboratory apparatus - later to be
replaced by new equipment. Took over +
worked 19 acres of worst land in Ala.

Within 1 yr. had treated the soil until it showed
a net gain of \$4 an acre, 7 yrs later producing
80 bu of sweet potatoes on 1 acre of sandy
loam, same yr producing another crop on
same acre. Profit of \$75-. He insisted on
raising less cotton + more peanuts + sweet
potatoes + results of labors are found in
hundreds of new by products of these.

Rec'd many fine offers - one made by Thomas
A. Edison, but has steadfastly refused all,
even a salary of \$1,00,000 saying his work
was in the South among his own people.
He believes God called him to serve humanity by
making serviceable products out of waste
materials. In 1931 Tuskegee was presented
with a bronze plaque of Dr. Carver.

Life Story

NOT MUCH TO MY LIFE EXCEPT STRUGGLES
Plummett Rhett Tucker (Negro)

Rhussus L. Perry (Macon Co.)
R.V. Waldrep, reviser

and in religion.

I told her of my interest in her life story, and she was pleased. She looked at me with a proud smile.

"There is not much in my life except struggles--struggles to be what I wanted to be--struggles to exist..."

"I was seven years old when I began school. I began to study in the blue-back speller. But the text was soon changed to

Swinton's Word Primer and to McGuffey's first reader. I learned so fast--" Mrs. Tucker's white teeth shone with a smile-- "that

my teacher promoted me to the third grade while I was still seven years old. I saw my father paying out money for our

schooling and I made up my mind that he would not waste his

I met Plummett Rhett Tucker at the Baptist Woman's State Convention. But before I met here she spoke on the drink-question. When I got the chance I extended my hand to her and congratulated her on her speech.

She is a slim, dark woman of 49 years; she weighs hundred-thirty pounds, and is five feet tall. Her face is round, and when I spoke of her speech it beamed beneath the soft, black hair that is parted and lowered over dark, brown eyes. As she spoke, her voice was clear, demanding, and sincere.

We walked to a seat, and I noticed that her gait was quick and erect. She was dressed in a black and white figured dress.

"I try to think and ^{to} express myself in the best way I know how," she told me, as we took seats off to one side of the building. "I am deeply interested in ~~the~~ the drink-question



and in religion."

I told her of my interest in her life story, and she was pleased. She thanked me with a proud smile...

"There is not much ^{of} my life except struggles---struggles to be what I wanted to be---struggles to exist...

"I was seven years old when I began school. I began my study in the blue-back speller. But the text was soon changed to Swinton's Word Primer and to McGuffey's first reader. I learned so fast---" Mrs. Tucker's white teeth shone with a smile--- "That my teacher promoted me to the third grade while I was still seven years old. I saw my father paying out money for our schooling and I made up my mind that he would not waste his money on me. I studied hard; for I wanted my parents to be proud of me.

"We lived in Barbour County where the land was poor, but my father was a good provider. He kept our home happy by raising plenty of food-stuff.

"My Dad always expressed regret for not having had a chance to get an education. So he said: 'I promised God that if I had any children I would surely see that they get an education and not have to suffer embarrassment, as I had to suffer.'

"My mother suggested to Dad that he stop us from school long enough to help get the cotton out before a gale came and blew the cotton out of the field. I remember very well my Dad said: 'No; a gale may come any time and blow my cotton away, but no gale can blow the education out of my children's heads.' So we didn't stop school to go to work that time.

"I was studying very hard to be a school teacher at this time, but at the age of eleven I saw my dream shattered. My father died. He left eight children, and I was the oldest of ~~them~~ the lot. That meant the end of my ambition to be a teacher.

"My father had been a highly respected gentleman. Both white and colored respected and loved him. When he died the white people all stopped their gins and all their work until after the funeral. I always remember my parents as fine examples of womanhood and manhood. My mother had a ~~very~~ common education, but my father was an illiterate, but he had good common sense. The lessons my Dad taught us on virtue and thrift will never leave me.

"Our family was a very religious one; we always had family prayer. The sabbath was a sacred day; no one cut wood, miled cows, or did anything like work on the Lord's day.

"The Lord," went on Mrs. Tucker, "warned my Dad of his death six months before he died. ^{Dad} called us one day and said:

"I can't stay with you-all much longer; and when the Lord's call comes, I will not need a doctor. Study long as you can in school and always be honest and serve the Lord."

"On November 18, 1901, my father fell dead.

"My mother carried on the best she could. She tried to run the farm, at which she was successful for four years. The boys left home, and mother had to give up the farm. We all worked by the day for 50¢, after getting rid of the farm.

"At this time my mother took me from school. She told me she could not send me to school and meet her other obligations. But still there were struggles and discouragements, and my mother made up her mind to marry again.

"I hated the man she decided to marry; I begged and pleaded with my mother not to marry the man she had picked out, but I soon saw there was no use. So I decided to get married, even if I was not ready to marry. I was determined not to stay with a step-father. I reasoned that I would probably get myself talked about. By marrying I would save my good name. I knew that in growing up in my community that you must keep your good name, or no intelligent family would recognize you. So at sixteen I was married.

"The first year of our married life, Charlie, my husband, worked on wages of \$12 per month. After that he worked ^{on shares} ~~as a sharecropper~~ for a long time. He gathered turpentine.

"With the year 1909, came ^{an existence} ~~something~~ that I will always remember. It was a hard year for me. My husband and I lived down on Pea River. Here all the people gambled. Even the women went out and picked boxes of turpentine to gamble with; they lived lives of infidelity too.

"My husband could not stand the temptation; he joined them in being unfaithful ~~husbands~~. Many a day I wished I had never been born. I sopped lard gravy for six months. I had one dress which cost 5¢ per yard. This dress I would pull off at night, wash, dry, and press so that I could wear it the next day. I often felt that I could not go on, but I could hear my marriage vows ~~ringing~~ ringing in my ears: 'For better or worse.' I could hear my father saying: 'Always be honest, be a lady.' I made up my mind that I would stand up and take my lot. Yet at times I cursed, at times cried. I seldom laughed. And I oftended prayed, and it was those prayers that kept me and which are still keeping me.

had been trained to love my church and to try to keep in
"One day I told my husband that I did not want to raise my children down on Pea River. He wanted to stay, but I was determined to get away from that wicked River. I remembered having read: 'Keep flax from fire and use from gaming tables.' I knew that gambling was and is a crime. I knew it broke one of the ten commandments. President Washington, said ~~that~~ that "the man who treasures gambling is a child of avarice and brother of iniquity." The devil invented gambling to trap suckers. Gambling starts with a dollar and ends with a mortgage. When a man becomes broke he will mortgage anything to gratify his mean love of gambling. Old Daddy rooster has a better principle; for when he crows he's with his family, while the gambler is in some high building or low din gambling by a dim light. Beware of him standing on corners indulging bad company, and disrespecting his rearing...

"I made up my mind that this was a bad place to bring up my children. I persuaded my husband to move to Troy where we stayed two years, and from there we moved to Henry County to work on shares.

"In Henry County I worked hard all the time. I washed for my baby at noon and at night I would feed my children, bathe them, put them to bed; and then I cooked my dessert for the next day, cleaned my house, and took my bath. Then I sat down to read my Bible or some other good book until two or three o'clock in the morning. Breakfast was at four. I didn't do this every night; for I had to have sleep. I arranged to sit up one night and sleep the next night. I was trying to enlighten myself so I would know what the preacher was talking about when I went to church. I became a Christian. I had joined the church at fourteen, and I

had been trained to. love my church and to try to keep in sight of educated groups.

"Of all my Christian experiences, the hymn: I Did Not Love My Shepherd's Voice and Would Not Be Controlled moved me most. It started the prayer wheel turning in my soul. The words of this song caused me to give my heart to God. When I was bringing up my family, I could not attend church as much as I desired. Often I would not have a dress or a pair of shoes to wear. I promised God I would always serve him if he would help me to get clothes for my children and myself; so we could go to church whenever we wanted to go.

"God answered my prayers. My husband became a changed man. He bought me a home and he gives ~~me~~ our family the best he can afford. I am happy. What we have may not seem much to others, but it is like heaven to me, and I mean to serve God until I died.

"I am a proud mother of ten children. I almost lost ~~my~~ health ~~by~~ fooling with mid-wives. My mother told me a mid-wife was better than a doctor, but she did not know. She thought she was telling me the best thing to do. With my last two children I had a doctor and I felt much better. I am now able to tell any one that a ~~mid-wife~~ mid-wife is not to be compared with a doctor.

"I am not allowed to vote. If I were, I sure would vote against whisky..."

Mary Simpson (i)

R.L. Perry,
Macon County,
August 24, 1939.

Life Story of Mary Simpson of Mt. Zion Community.

Mary Simpson is a dark brown skin woman. She is about 4 1/2 feet tall, weighing about 130. She has soft hair which she keeps dyed jet black. The gray ~~root~~ hair close to the roots may be seen. Her almost round face carries a very pleasant smile. When she talks to you she looks straight into your eyes with her sharp, dark brown eyes. She holds herself quite erect and has a quick gait. Her speech is clear but quick. She is a good entertainer.

She is a farmer and enjoys it. Most of the work is done on shares.

The year around you can find hams and bacon which she kills and cures on her place.

The farm is a thing of beauty. There lies on the left of this large lawn a lovely high garden where grow roses, verbenas and daisies. A large shady peach tree stands to the left of the lawn about 15 feet from left corner of the porch under which are two green lawn chairs. Pretty green shrubbery (some flowering) grows all around the house. A picturesque little flower garden of roses and other flowers lay on the right back side of the lawn where ~~some~~ ^{floral} bees, butterflies and humming birds. A fence of shrubbery divides the front yard from the back yard. Settling on the right in the back is a large barn and stable. nearby is a chicken house and other little houses for various uses. There were lots and lots of plywood, rock and white lumber stacked, in and around the stable. Peach, fig, and pear trees were bearing with luscious fruit. A flower garden is in the back also. A well with concreted workings is on the back with a rope and bucket hanging from a post over the well. A Slinger and a cup is hanging there for water. Of course this well is to be replaced very soon by the Government pump system. The government also has the Dixie line electricity out on this farm.

When I told Mary my visit, she hesitated at first. After I explained

Mary Gets Her Desires¹

R.L. P.
Macon County
Aug. 24, 1939

This very attractive and convenient farm home is about 12 miles north of Tuskegee. The house sets about 100 feet from the Franklin and Dadville highway. It is a pretty little bungalow that is sure to get a second look from passerbys. On the porch are pot flowers and porch chairs with white slip over covers. On each side of the gate entering the lane leading up to this lovely house is a ~~***~~ rock column about four feet high in which are growing pretty cedars. Several bushes of Crepe Myrtle are growing just inside by these columns. ~~Various sites of rocks are~~ Green shrubbery grows along the rock lined lane up to the yard where verbenas are blooming along the walk to the concrete steps.

The lawn is a thing of beauty. There lies on the left of this large lawn a lovely rock garden where grows zenias, verbenas and daisies. A large shady pecan tree stands to the left of the lawn about 15 feet from left corner of the porch under which are two green lawn chairs. Pretty green shrubbery (some flowering) grows all around the house. A picturesque little flower garden of roses and other flowers lay on the right back side of the lawn where ~~flitter~~ bees, butterflies and humming birds. A fence of shurbbery divides the front yard from the back yard. Setting on the right in the back is a large barn and stable, nearby is a chicken house and other little houses for various uses. There were lots and lots of plymouth rock and white leghorn chickens, in and around the stable. Peach, fig, and pear trees were hanging with lucious fruit. A flower garden is in the back also. A well with concreted curbings is on the back with a rope and bucket hanging from a post over the well. a dipper and a cup is hanging there for passerbys. Of course this well is to be replaced very soon by the Government pump system. The government also has the Dixie line electricity out on this farm.

When I told Mary my mission, she hesitated at first. After I explained

why and for whom I wanted the information, she agreed to give it to me. So many people visits this rather unusual woman who has achieved an enviable reputation.

She was peeling peaches and they were nice ripe soft ones. She likes to share, so we both enjoyed the luscious fruit. As we ate she began to tell me about herself:

"I was born right here in this community (Mt. Zion) January 1, 1876. I can remember very well how religious and good my mother was. She was a faithful christian and always had family prayer. She taught us to kneel when we would pray. I can remember that my dad would sit up as we kneeled because he wasn't a christian. My mother's daily christian living and praying converted my dad. He joined the church and became a deacon. This made my mother happy. She lived to see all of us join the church.

"My parents were farmers and always worked hard and tried to teach all of us to work. My dad was brought here from ~~Georgia~~ Georgia a slave. Right here on this same spot my dad and mother bought 320 acres which belonged to the white people to whom my parents had been slaves. The white people said that they wanted their Negroes to have the land.

"I started to school when I was seven years old. My first teacher's name was Mr. Rich Pots. Oh, I was so happy to start to school. I worried mother long before it was time for me to start to school. We could not not start to school until we were seven years old. I do not remember having one fight in school. There were two distinct classes in our school. One of these classes was called, fat boy's class and the Pretty girl's class to which I belonged.

"I can remember how I always wanted something pretty for the house even when I was a little girl. I made my first quilt when I was about eight years old. When they would ask me what I wanted the Santa to bring me, I would always ask for vases for the mantle when I get a house of my own. I had seen large seven room homes, about three of them in the community, of course they belonged to white

people. I was a little girl but I had hopes of some day owning a seven room house, nicely furnished, like those three seven room houses in our community. Even though I had never seen a Negro in such house I believed that it was possible for any one to work and save and get a beautiful home. And if this was possible I had a mind that I would be one to own such a home.

"Aside from a beautifully furnished home I longed to own a fountain pen, a watch and chain and a pair of nose glasses." Here she laughed and said, "I have to wear glasses now and I dont find it so pleasant as I dreamed when I was a girl!"

"I learned from my mother, at an early age to love Sunday school and church. While I was quite young, I remember a sermon the pastor preached when I was a child, but I was a christian, his text was, 'Delight Thyself in The Lord, And He Shall Give Thee the Desires of Thy Heart'. I believed this statement, together with my mother's faithful christian life helped me to struggle and ~~attain~~ strive to get those things which were the desires of my heart. Yes, I believed that if I would try to serve the Lord that he would help me to realize my desires. I always went to Sunday school and church and tried to do what I could in my church and community to help make it better. I tried and still do try to help in Christs program to evangelize the world. I may can't do much, but I do all that I can as far as I know.

"I was not able to go on as far as I wanted to in school. So anxious was I to go to school that when I had a chance to go to Tuskegee, I was happy even though I did not have but fifteen cents. It was in 1895 I went to Tuskegee. At this time you did not have to pay an entrance fee. I worked in the day and went o to school at night. I worked the first year in the Teacher's home. I worked the next year for Mrs Penny and the next year I worked in the sewing room. I had only one apron, but I washed that apron in the evening, I would get up early iron that apeon on the lamp chimmney and make a clean appearance the next day. I got so bare for clothes that Mrs Richardson, Capt. Richardson's wife that's

at the Institute went to the "barrel room" and got me some clothes. She was a Miss Laura Mabry then. At Tuskegee in those days the Northern white people would send barrel of clothes down for poor children. They had plenty children who needed them. In those days we had plenty fine smart children who would come to school bare and penniless. They were poor but ambitious and ~~the~~ Booker T. saw to it that these poor ambitious children were given a chance. I was one of these children who wanted a chance. I was given a chance and I worked as hard as I studied. My health failed me and I had to stop school. As I recall about my fifteen cents that I had when I entered school, the funny thing I had that fifteen cents when school closed. I was afraid if I spent my fifteen cents, something would turn up that I needed it worse for, so I held tight to that money.

the room where they kept these clothes was called "Barrel Room"

"I decided to get married. I was only fifteen when I married the first time. I married Henry McKenzie. My life was shocked by a mob who lynched him. A Mr. Johnie Siglers was found dead and they suspicioned that my husband did it. They had his trial but the jury split on it. So the side that wanted him hung took him and lynched him.

"I didn't let this coward me down. I decided to work and try to make a mark in life so that some one would know that I lived and had not lived in vain. Booker T. Washington would go round lecturing to farmers, he would always tell us to bring something to town with us to sell so we could have a little cash to get the things we needed without going in debt for everything. I took this in and profited by it. Then Mr. Washington would teach the farmers to raise plenty food stuff this I did and it meant so much to me. When he would send county agents around I always cooperated with them and I always found that they could help us in our farm problems.

"I made a sad mistake when I married my second husband. He was the type who did not want anything. His name was Foster Simpson. We had some land where we were trying to farm. This land was just washing away. I did not know anything about

terracing but I did know that if a ditch was dug across the field it would prevent the washing away of all the rich soil. My husband seemed perfectly satisfied about the land washing away. I studied the directions of the wash and I decided we would dig ditches to prevent it. I told my husband, Foster, about what I thought should be done. He cursed me out but I was determined about what I thought was right so I marked the ditch by digging holes along and then argued with Foster until we argued into a fight and then he helped me to dig the ditches. This would happen every spring. An argument, fight and then the ditches. I would rake the ditches and help with all the hard work around the farm for I wanted something. I boarded the teachers, took in sewing and did every thing I could possible do to try to fix up my little humble home. We had only one room and a dirt floor kitchen. But I had seen over to Tuskegee the nice toilets and I wanted one. I wanted a dinning room too so I tore down an old shed that we did not need and built a toilet myself. I took some of the boards and made a ^{an} partition in my kitchen and made a dinning room. The neighbors saw my toilet and my other fixings around so they followed. I was the first in my community to own a toilet. Before this time we all had thought the woods afforded a good enough place for a natural toilet..

"I kept on trying to make little additions to the home and trying to fix it so it would look attractive and this would make my husband mad. We just could not agree. He treated me so bad that I just went to court and asked for a divorce. Well the court gave him everything, even the forty acres of land we worked together and bought. I did have forty acres of land my father left for me. But I did not have a mule or nothing to start my farm on the following year. But I still remembered, "Delight thyself in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart". I still had faith in God.

"I had gone through so much bad treatment from my husband that I had nervous indigestion and the doctor had to put me on malted milk for a long time. When the deacons asked my husband why we parted, he said, "She's too damned high minded. She wants too much.

"I had a son in Cincinnati, Ohio. He decided to come down and help me on the farm. This was in 1918. After the crops were laid by, my son Clarence McKenzie went to training camp at Tuskegee Institute. ~~While~~ We made eight bales of cotton for which I got forty cents (40¢) a pound. The government gave me \$15 for my son and this helped me to pay the debt of \$1011.75 and to buy back the forty acres which the court gave my husband. I struggled hard this year to do these things. I did a lot of peddling and working at night. At this time I was so anxious to pay my debts and start fixing up my home that I had one dress for Sunday and going to town and one pair of slippers which I bought for 50¢. I went to church and was not ashamed for I believed so strong that if I delighted in the Lord and His works that I would have something some day.

"While my son was in training at Tuskegee he met and married Bettie Postoak, oilwell queen. She helped me lots at that time. I had someone working on halves and I always carried good insurance on my little home. When the house burned my insurance was paid.

"Mrs Laura Daily and Mr. Robert Thurston was demonstrators at this time and is yet. They taught me how to do proper terracing and to plant winter cover crops which has improved my land so very much. I continued to peddle to help myself so as to keep out of debt. I wanted to put that insurance into a new home. Mrs Daily made my plans and helped me with the plans for this new home which I am in now. The house cost \$2000. The insurance was \$1700. I put that \$1700 into the house and furnished it and moved into it in 1930. Right after this the prices on cotton dropped to five and six cents per pound. This left me with a big debt. I had another hard struggle, but I kept faith. In 1933 the government had the farmers to plow up their cotton and was allowing 10¢ a pound and estimating a-half bale to the acre. I had twenty acres planted. So I pulled through that dark spot. I have gladly followed the plans of the government every since. It has helped me to have clear to day my one hundred and eighty acres of land. The

Government is making it possible for us to enjoy electricity and pump system of running water. God bless the Roosevelts. Theodore Roosevelt gave farmers Rural delivery and then comes F.D.Roosevelt and gives the farmer the joy of bright lights and running water. And F.D.R. has helped us in so many ways that we no longer feel forgotten. If I did vote I surely would vote for Roosevelt to be president another term.

"Well, I just keep on thanking God for letting me see the most of the desires and enjoy the things I use to long for. I recommend anyone to delight in the ways of the Lord and He will surely give you the desires of your heart.

I should think Mrs. Mary Simpson certainly has the desires of her heart. As well as pretty outside and attractive, her home is very attractive inside. It is on the farm but as modernly and attractively furnished as any city home.

~~X~~ In the living room is a beautiful mahogany living room suite, a victrola, a library table on which sets an attractive table lamp. On the mantle are two very pretty vases. A pretty vase sets on the victrola. A large what-not rack in a corner with what-nots on the shelves, a smoking stand and a magazine rack, pretty scrim curtains with drapes and everything harmonizes beautifully in her rooms. All the floors are varnished and have becoming floor coverings.

The guest bedroom has an oak vanity bedroom suite, white curtains with pastel floral drapes and becoming wall pictures and vases.

The other two bedrooms are lovely furnished with maple furnishings.

The dinning room has a rich oak dining room suit consisting of nine pieces. A very attractive and gorgeous oblong mirror hangs over the buffet.

The bathroom is furnished in white.

The kitchen is very attractive. The wood and coal stove is soft green and yellow. convenient shelves and a cabinet add to the convenience and neatness of this kitchen. A pair of snow white curtains with three rows of varicolored braid hung at the two windows.

The pantry is ~~inviting~~ inviting. Every shelf in this spacious pantry

is filled with canned fruits and vegetables, jellies and jams.

Excellent taste is shown throughout this lovely farm home in color, harmony and furnishings.

Mrs. Mary Simpson is now one of the highly respected citizens of Macon county. She is active in religious and civic organizations. She is president of the Woman's district convention of the Ebenezer Association. She says she is happy. She says she always felt that people should live to be known, to be useful and to be looked on as one worthy of being an example for someone else.