

The Little White House NEWSLETTER



Roosevelt's Little White House - 706-655-5870 - 401 Little White House Rd. - Warm Springs, Ga. 31830

African Americans, FDR and Warm Springs

Winter Quarter 2019

Warm Springs transformed the life of FDR and in turn, he transformed the lives of millions. Little has been told of the African American experience connected to Warm Springs and Franklin D. Roosevelt. In this issue, we will explore just a few of the influences and inspirations African Americans provided the President and First Lady just as civil rights era began to bud.

IRVIN McDUFFIE DEVOTED VALET TO FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Only a very few men in our nation's history can say they served as valet to the President of the United States. Irvin McDuffie was one of them. Hired by Franklin Delano Roosevelt as valet and personal assistant, McDuffie – or Mac, as FDR called him – later described Roosevelt as “the kindest and finest man in the world.”

Irvin McDuffie was a Georgia native. He worked his way up from shining shoes in an Atlanta barber shop to co-owning a shop. Along the way, however, he also served as a valet for the German consul in Atlanta. In 1927, McDuffie injured his legs and, after that, could not stand for extended periods. One of his barbershop customers heard him say he wished to find another valet position instead. As it happened, this customer was a building materials supplier to FDR's Warm Springs Foundation. He mentioned McDuffie to Roosevelt, knowing he was looking for a valet.

Unlike some other presidential valets, McDuffie never actually selected FDR's wardrobe. He would lay out several options, but FDR always made the final decision. McDuffie did make an “executive” wardrobe decision one time, though. He confiscated the tie FDR was wearing at the time of an attempted assassination in 1933, when he was still President-Elect. He felt the tie had become unlucky.

In addition to duties normally associated with being a valet, McDuffie assisted the President with personal activities made difficult by FDR's polio. Mac lifted FDR into and out of bed and his wheelchair, and

helped him put on his steel leg braces. He also helped him dress. He was always in awe of Roosevelt, one time saying of him, “He can work five men to death while he lies in bed.”

Irvin McDuffie even had an official double. FDR started using one – a man named Sean O'Grady – in 1932. Although the President had received death threats, the primary reason for introducing a double was that the president's polio tired him, making it difficult to make every scheduled public appearance. From even a short distance, O'Grady looked remarkably like FDR. And just after the inauguration in 1933, the president's valet was also replaced with a double for certain public appearances -- one Rufus Strother. This was the first time either an American President or his valet used a double.

McDuffie himself accompanied President Roosevelt to Brazil in 1936. During the visit, Mac was detained by the Rio de Janeiro police. It was a mistake, but the incident caused McDuffie to miss the sailing of the USS Indianapolis, the President's ship. FDR was so upset at the thought of making do without his valet, he dispatched the USS Chester to bring McDuffie home.

In her memoirs, Lizzie McDuffie noted that she and her husband became FDR's insider spokespeople for African American conditions. Their positions within the White House family were well-known, so they were privy to reports of discrimination in the postal service and the Works Progress Administration, among other issues. They personally carried these stories to the President.

Toward the end of his life, Irvin McDuffie worked in a job that FDR arranged at the Treasury Department. He passed away on January 30, 1945. Coincidentally, that was the date of Roosevelt's 63th birthday. source: Raleigh DeGeers



Lizzie McDuffie

Maid for the President as well as the King and Queen of England

Elizabeth "Lizzie" McDuffie worked for the Roosevelt family as a maid from the 1920s until President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed away while in office in 1945. Her husband, Irvin "Mac" McDuffie, was the president's personal valet. During her time at the White House, Lizzie McDuffie made an impact in many ways.

Because of their close proximity to the president, the McDuffies heard from many African Americans across the country, and they were able to bring some problems to President Roosevelt's attention. Lizzie McDuffie herself made sure that the president was aware of racial discrimination in the Postal Service and Works Progress Administration. She was also an important contact between civil rights advocates and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

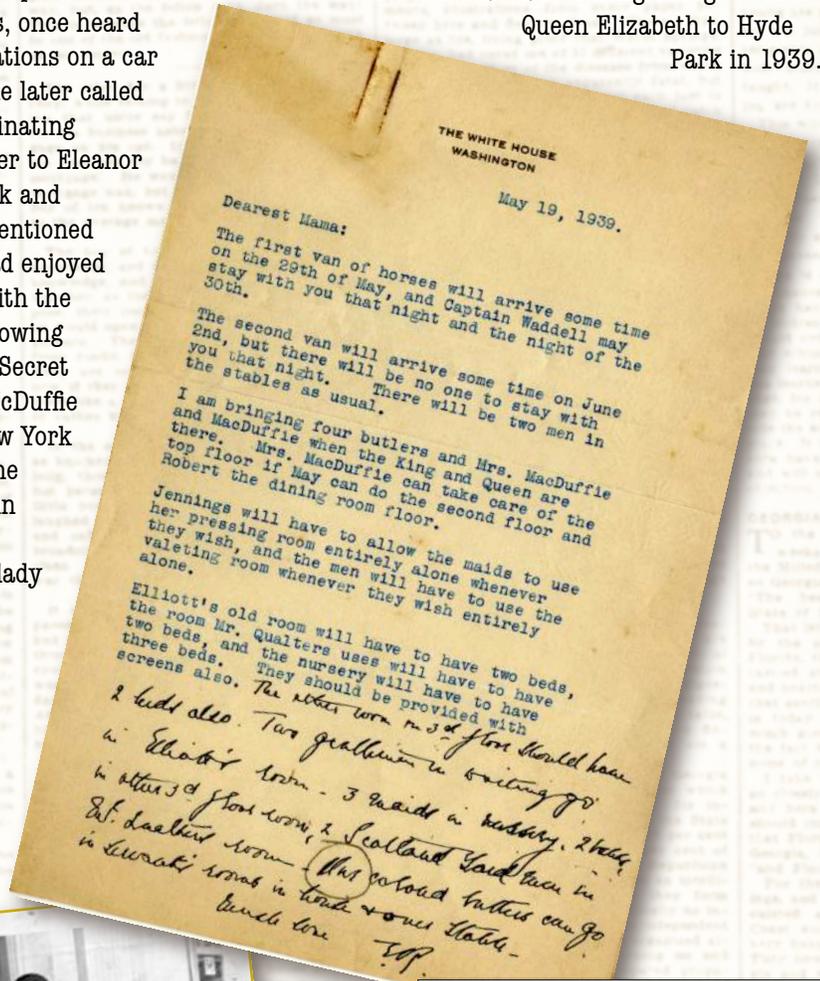
McDuffie also went on the campaign trail for President Roosevelt during the elections of 1936 and 1940 in an effort to gain the support of African-American voters. To many, she was considered an authority on the administration due to her and her husband's employment at the White House. A newspaper account of one rally in St. Louis said that she gave both "statistical reasons"

to reelect Roosevelt and "intimate details of White House life."

Finally, McDuffie was known to many in the White House as a talented entertainer. Lillian Rogers Parks, whose tenure in the White House as a seamstress overlapped with McDuffie's, recalled in her memoir that President Roosevelt loved to hear McDuffie "recite." Lorena Hickok, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and a reporter for the Associated Press, once heard McDuffie's recitations on a car ride together. She later called McDuffie a "fascinating person" in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt. Hickok and McDuffie both mentioned how McDuffie had enjoyed reading "Gone with the Wind" after borrowing the book from a Secret Service agent. McDuffie later went to New York to audition for the part of Mammy in "Gone with the Wind." The first lady even provided a letter of

recommendation to help her chances. However, the role was given to Hattie McDaniel, who later won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, the first African American entertainer to do so.

Also, Lizzie and Mac helped set the house up (Springwood) for the arrival of the King and Queen of England. Below is the letter Eleanor wrote to FDR's Mother for the momentous visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Hyde Park in 1939.



Daisy McAfee Bonner "The Queen of the Larder."

Daisy Bonner cooked the first meal and the last one in the Little White House. She began cooking at the Meriwether Inn and went on to cook for FDR until his death in 1945. He nicknamed her "Queen of the Larder" for her cooking skills. I imagine that she is the only person to have seen everyone who entered the president's cottage. She died in 1958 and is buried in an unmarked grave in Warm Springs. Sadly, she is the only person who was never interviewed after FDR's death, although I don't think she would have divulged any secrets.

She was famously known for her "Country Captain" and other comfort foods at the Meriwether Inn. Fred Botts, one of the first polio patients to come to Warm Springs in 1925 described his first meal like this: *"I was wheeled out to the dining, room and placed at the head of a long table. A girl sat a large platter of "something" in front of me which I was smilingly told was "Country Captain". This is a typical southern dish (or is it from India?) and is composed as follows: chicken, rice, raisins, tomatoes, onions, thyme, curry and garlic. An artistic hand had delicately frescoed it over --- fore and aft, so that now it reposed in front of me a truly beautiful study in brown and white. I ate it all up!"*

Inside the Little White House is a note penciled on the wall by Daisy Bonner in 1947 when she came back to help inventory the house after it was dedicated as a memorial to FDR that states: **"Daisy Bonner Cook the first meal and the last one in this cottage for President Roosevelt."**

From the book: *The President's Kitchen Cabinet: The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, from the Washingtons to the Obamas* by Adrienne Miller

Daisy McAfee Bonner, for example, FDR's cook at his Warm Springs retreat, described the president's final day on earth in 1945, when he was struck down just as his lunchtime cheese soufflé emerged from the oven. Sorrowfully, but with a cook's pride, she recalled, "He never ate that soufflé, but it never fell until the minute he died."



If you make a pilgrimage to Hyde Park to FDR's home, you will see that the cafeteria at the welcoming center there is named after his White House cook, Henrietta Nesbitt. There is a bit of underlying humor and irony here. By all reports, FDR hated Mrs. Nesbitt's cooking and much preferred that of his cook at Warm Springs, Daisy Bonner.

President Roosevelt's Favorite Dish

From Lady Liberty by Pat DiGeorge, based on the experiences of her parents during World War II

"It's been a while since I've written about one of my favorite World War II veterans, Lt. Col. Monroe F. "Buddy" Stamps. Buddy also served our country in Korea and on his very last day of duty barely made it out alive. Buddy grew up in Manchester, GA, a stone's throw from President Roosevelt's Little White House at Warm Springs. Buddy's mother happened to be a friend of Miss Daisy Bonner, the President's cook while he was at Warm Springs. Daisy cooked for the President for twenty years. In fact, she prepared "the first meal and the last" that he enjoyed in his beloved little home in rural Georgia near the healing springs. Just so no one would forget she scribbled those words on the kitchen wall. Mrs. Stamps, Buddy's Mom, asked Daisy to autograph this recipe, which Daisy labeled as the President's favorite. Rumor has it that Daisy was indeed FDR's preferred cook. I read here that FDR's favorite meal was "Brunswick Stew" but I beg to disagree. Daisy said it was "The Country Captain!" and I'll take her word for it. Daisy Bonner died on April 23, 1958, at her home in Warm Springs. She was only 55 years old."

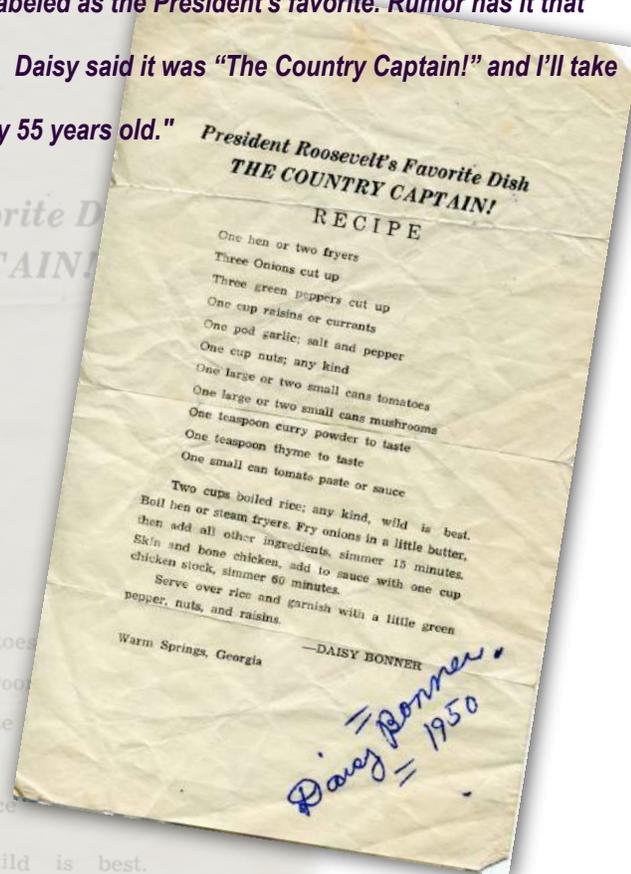
Here's the recipe for the miraculous soufflé that Daisy Bonner prepared the day that her beloved president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, died. Bonner always served this dish with stuffed baked tomatoes, peas, plain lettuce salad with French dressing, Melba toast, and coffee. [The President's Kitchen Cabinet author Adrian Miller.]

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 heaping tablespoons flour
- Pinch of salt
- 1/2 teaspoon prepared mustard
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 3/4 cup grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 5 eggs, separated
- 1 teaspoon baking powder

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. Melt the butter in a saucepan and blend in the flour, salt, and mustard. Gradually add enough milk to make a thin sauce.
3. Add the cheese and slightly beaten egg yolks.
4. Set aside to cool until ready to bake.
5. When ready to bake, beat the egg whites stiff with the baking powder.
6. Fold the egg whites into the cheese mixture.
7. Put in a buttered, 8 x 8 baking dish.
8. Bake 30 minutes 375° F.
9. When soufflé is done it should be very high and brown but soft in the middle.
10. Serve immediately.



FDR's also loved Brunswick Stew, as prepared by Daisy. It was served to him at as a surprise at the planned barbeque/minstrel show he never attended the afternoon of his death.

Here's the recipe:

- 3 to 3-1/2 pounds stewing chicken (cut into 8-10 pieces)
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons bacon fat
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 2 green onions, diced
- 3 cups small potatoes, diced
- 3 large tomatoes, peeled and diced
- 1-1/2 cups Lima or butter beans, fresh or frozen
- 1 cup corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- 1/2 cup okra, diced
- 1/2 cup sherry
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons butter

Graham Jackson, Sr. "Official Musician of the State of Georgia"

Chief Petty Officer Graham Jackson became a personal friend of Eleanor and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and had played command performances in Washington numerous times. He was present in Warm Springs, Georgia, when Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945. The two had been collaborating at the Little White House on a version of Dvorak's "Goin' Home" the day before. Jackson became a national icon when Ed Clark, a Life magazine photographer, captured a photo of a tearful Jackson, accordion in hand, playing "Goin' Home" as Roosevelt's funeral train left Warm Springs.

America was in mourning on April 12, 1945. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the country's only four-term president, who had led a shattered people through the impossible days of the Depression and through most of the Second World War, had just died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage.

Ed Clark, a Life magazine photographer, drove all night from his home in Nashville to Roosevelt's residence in Warm Springs, Ga., to cover the news. He arrived in time to join a swarm of photographers and reporters jockeying for position as the hearse carrying Roosevelt's coffin approached the rail station for its trip back to Washington.

Then Clark, a slight, unobtrusive man, heard one of Roosevelt's favorite hymns, "Goin' Home," being played on an accordion. With his Leica in hand, he wheeled and saw a Navy bandsman, CPO Graham Jackson, with tears of anguish streaming down his face. "I thought, what a picture," Clark told an interviewer years later. Clark hoped that no one else saw what he was seeing as he snapped a few frames. Apparently no one else did, and Clark's dramatic photo, which became the symbol of a nation in grief, took up an entire page in the next issue of Life.

Jackson served in the Navy from 1942 to 1945. Eventually he received six honorary citations for his war bond fundraising, which helped yield more than \$3,000,000 in sales, and recruiting for the Navy.

As his musical notoriety increased, Jackson became known as "**The Ambassador of Good Will**". He was named **Official Musician of the State of Georgia** by Governor Jimmy Carter on November 30, 1971. Newspaper clippings in his personal papers state that he played for six presidents earning him the title: "**Entertainer of Presidents**".



Tuskegee Airmen and WWII

C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson

Anderson with Eleanor Roosevelt, March 1941

The First Lady's flight

In 1940, Anderson was recruited by the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, to serve as the Chief Civilian Flight Instructor for its new program to train black pilots. He developed a pilot training program, taught the Program's first advanced course, and earned his nickname, "Chief". In March 1941, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was touring the Institute's hospital. Knowing of the flight program, she asked to meet its chief instructor. The First Lady told Anderson she had always heard that "colored people couldn't fly," but it appeared that he could. "I'm just going to have a take flight with you," she said. Anderson was not about to turn down the First Lady, despite the protests of her security detail. Upon returning 40 minutes later, Anderson's delighted passenger exclaimed, "Well I see you can fly, all right!" No doubt her experience was a boost to the Roosevelt administration, which had just established the Tuskegee Airmen Experiment to explore if it was possible to train black pilots for military service. Anderson went on to train other famous Military Aviation Pioneers



such as General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and General Daniel "Chappie" James, Sr.

Eleanor Roosevelt used her position as a trustee of the Julius Rosenwald Fund to arrange a loan of \$175,000 to help finance the building of Moton Field.

By June 1941, Anderson was selected by the Army as Tuskegee's Ground Commander and Chief Instructor for aviation cadets of the 99th Pursuit Squadron, America's first all-black fighter squadron. The 99th would

eventually join three other squadrons of Tuskegee Airmen in the 332nd Fighter Group, known as the Red Tails. The 450 Tuskegee Airmen who saw combat flew 1,378 combat missions, destroyed 260 enemy planes, and earned over 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, among numerous other awards.



Warm Springs Rosenwald School

Booker T. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute and Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and president of Sears Roebuck, built state-of-the-art schools for African-American children across the South. The effort has been called the most important initiative to advance black education in the early 20th century.

Attending a Rosenwald School put a student at the vanguard of education for southern African-American children. The architecture of the schools was a tangible statement of the equality of all children, and their programming made them a focal point of community identity and aspirations.

By 1928, one-third of the South's rural black school children and teachers were served by Rosenwald Schools.

1932, the year of Julius Rosenwald's death, the fund president announced that the Rural School Building Program would end with the close of that year. Before his election to the presidency, FDR promised the black residents of that town that they would get a Rosenwald School. In 1937, after his election, his Georgia friends gently reminded him of his pledge to them. Although the Rosenwald Fund had not made a school grant since 1932, President Franklin Roosevelt placed a call to Samuel Smith, who now headed the fund. Soon, Warm Springs had a new Rosenwald School—the last to be built in the South. Fittingly, it was named for another champion of equality: Eleanor Roosevelt.

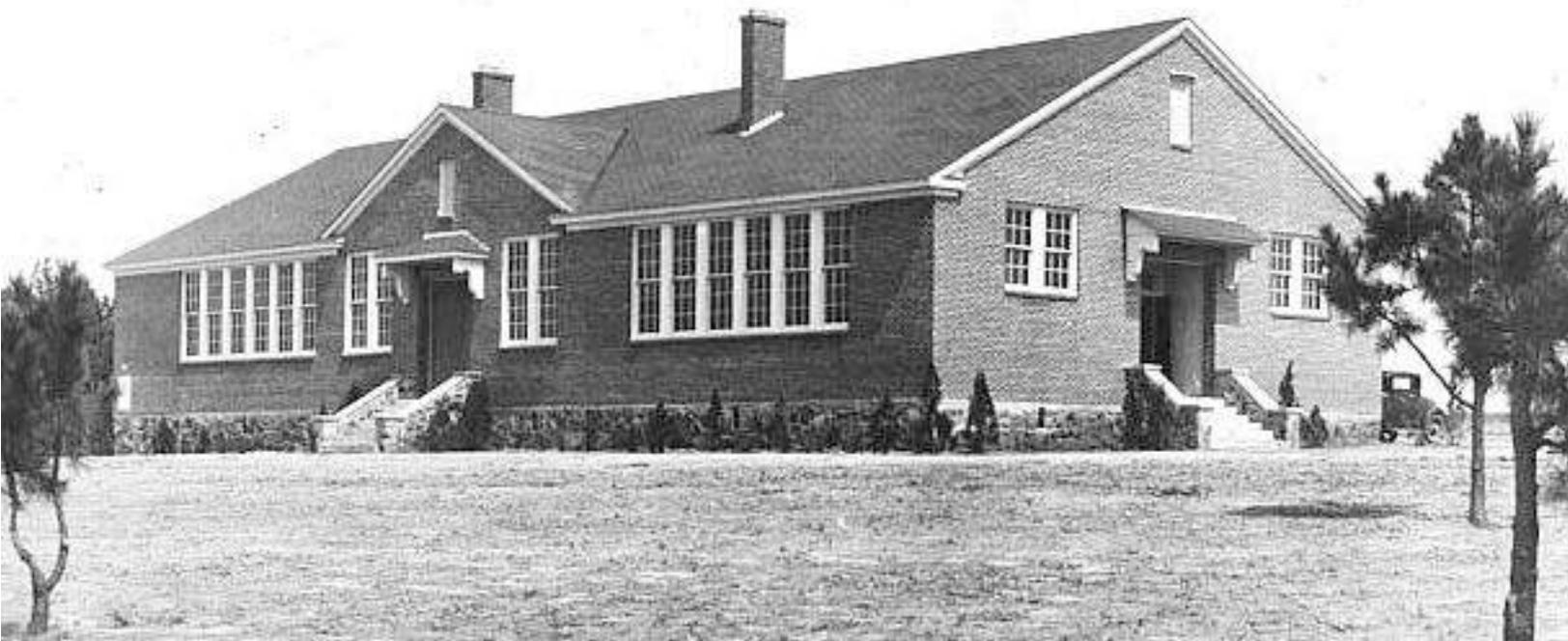
The Eleanor Roosevelt School was dedicated on March 18, 1937. The keynote speaker was President Roosevelt. Edwin R. Embree, president of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, addressed the crowd, along with M.L. Collins, state Superintendent of education. Robert L. Cousins, director of Negro education, accepted the building. S.L. Smith introduced the President as "your friend and good neighbor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt!" Roosevelt remarked that he began to learn economics at Warm Springs in 1924 through discussions with his neighbors about teachers' salaries and the price of cotton.



Dedication of the Eleanor Roosevelt Schoolhouse Warm Springs, Georgia, March 18, 1937

"I am glad that I have been introduced as your neighbor because I have been your neighbor now for a great many years. I am also glad that Mr. Smith went back to that day in Albany, in 1929, when we talked about the school needs in Warm Springs. The Julius Rosenwald Fund helped there materially in providing us with the plans for the other school which was built in 1929, and with the completion of this school this community is now pretty well fitted out with its physical needs as to school buildings.

I have known the parents and the grandparents of a good many of the boys and girls who are actually at school in this building at the present time, so that I have a personal feeling for you boys and girls. I know that this school is going to help you to be good citizens." FDR



George Washington Carver: Peanut Oil and Polio

In the 1930s, Carver began to treat patients with peanut oil massages. He reported positive results, which in turn made more and more people want to undergo the treatment. Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt joined in; gifted with the oil by Carver, he told the scientist, "I do use peanut oil from time to time and I am sure that it helps."

Unfortunately, despite the improvements that Carver witnessed and reported, there was never any scientific evidence that peanut oil actually helped polio victims recover. Instead, the patients may have benefited from the massage treatment itself, as well as the attentive care that Carver provided.

At Tuskegee Carver treated his friends to massages with peanut oil. By the 1930s he became convinced peanut oil could ameliorate the devastating paralysis that accompanied polio. He was certain that peanut oil applied during a massage not only saturated the skin and flesh but actually entered the blood stream and helped restore life to limbs withered by the effects of polio. In 1933 the Associated Press carried a story about Carver's alleged successes with peanut oil massages and, for a time, Tuskegee began to look like Lourdes as paralyzed pilgrims flocked to the Alabama school.

It is not clear just how effective Carver's massages were in treating polio. It is true that many of those treated testified that he had helped them regain at least some use of paralyzed limbs. Certainly, his claims about peanut oil massages do suggest a bit of the charlatan, but it should be pointed out that he never took payment for his treatments and that polio was a crippling disease that each summer seemed to affect more and more people. The fear of polio did not end until the development of an effective vaccine in the 1950s.

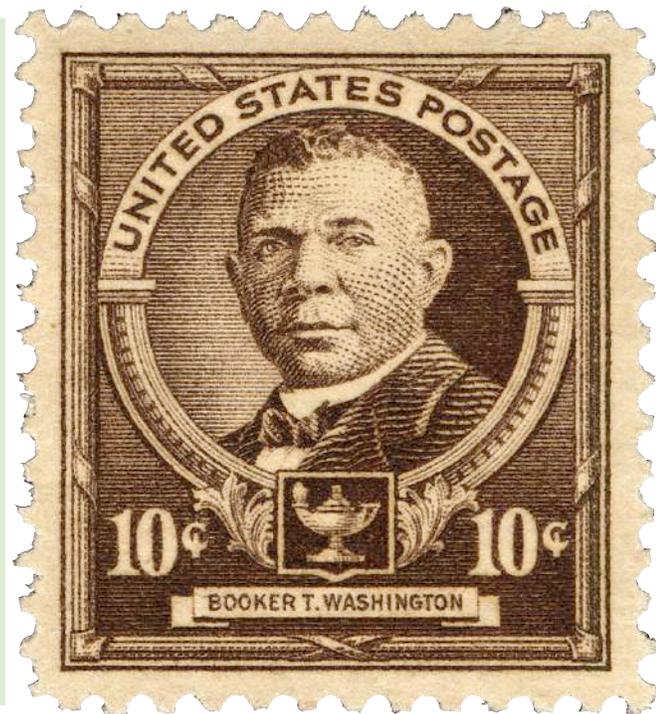


Booker T Washington Postage Stamp

On April 7, 1940, the Post Office Department issued a stamp honoring African-American educator Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) as part of its Famous Americans Series. The nation's first stamp to honor an African-American, it holds a unique place in American history. Social, economic, and legislative struggles since 1940 have produced deeper understanding and acceptance among racial groups. Today, the United States Postal Service (USPS) regularly honors African-Americans and their widely varied contributions to the nation and the world.

Born a slave in Hale's Ford, Virginia, Washington served as a role model for other struggling African-Americans, and, as founder of Alabama's Tuskegee Normal Industrial School (renamed Tuskegee Institute in 1937), he profoundly influenced the community's self-esteem and self-reliance. In 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, responding to numerous petitions from African-American supporters, recognized the timeliness of such a stamp and directed that Washington be considered for this important stamp series.

Booker T Washington founded Tuskegee Institute. He is also the first African American ever to be issued on a postage stamp. That was accomplished by President Roosevelt and one of the stamps is on display in the Memorial Museum



Basil O'Connor - Race and Polio

In September 1937, Roosevelt announced the formation of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis to “direct and coordinate the fight against this disease in all its phases.” The new foundation (soon known popularly by its campaign slogan, the March of Dimes) would be directed by O’Connor, and the president would not “hold any official position in it.” With Warm Springs trustees no longer in charge of national polio fundraising, the Georgia center could become just one of a number of regional centers caring for polio patients and training specialists.

In April 1939, Roosevelt made his first official visit to the Tuskegee Institute. He praised the beauty of the campus, visited the Veterans Hospital and shook hands with patients in wheelchairs, and talked briefly with Carver. O’Connor came in May to speak at the institute’s commencement ceremonies, where he announced that the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis would fund the Infantile Paralysis Center.

The Tuskegee Institute opened a polio center in 1941, funded by the March of Dimes. The center’s founding was the result of a new visibility of Black polio survivors and the growing political embarrassment around the policy of the Georgia Warm Springs polio rehabilitation center, which Franklin Roosevelt had founded in the 1920s before he became president and which had maintained a Whites-only policy of admission. This policy, reflecting the ubiquitous norm of race-segregated health facilities of the era, was also sustained by a persuasive scientific argument about polio itself: that Blacks were not susceptible to the disease.

After a decade of civil rights activism, this notion of polio as a White disease was challenged, and Black health professionals, emboldened by a new integrationist epidemiology, demanded that in polio, as in American medicine at large, health care should be provided regardless of race, color, or creed.



With the opening of the Tuskegee Infantile Paralysis Center and the prominent support of the nation’s largest disease philanthropy, Black leaders had a platform to talk in general about race and medicine, health care access, and the training of professionals. March of Dimes money shored up Tuskegee’s financial troubles, and by 1948 O’Connor had become president of the institute’s board of trustees.



All of this history, and so much more, happened because a private citizen, Franklin D. Roosevelt, came to swim in the warm springs of Georgia. Only because of his experiences in Warm Springs, Georgia was he able to re-enter the political world. And because he did, the world changed for millions of Americans to this day.

We hope that you will come see the place where the world changed:

Roosevelt’s Little White House

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