

## Willis McGlascoe Carter

Willis McGlascoe Carter was born a slave on September 3, 1852 at Locust Dale, Albemarle County, Virginia. He was the son of Rhoda Brown and Samuel Carter. Rhoda and Samuel lived on separate plantations that bordered each other. Willis taught himself to read and write with the help of family members, but hid the knowledge until after the Civil War. His father was killed in 1863 while being forced to work of the fortifications at Richmond. Once the family was freed, they moved to Waynesboro, Virginia.

Seeking more opportunities, Carter worked various laborer jobs to save money to attend school. He worked for the railroad, served as a waiter at a resort, and was employed at a saw mill. At last he moved to Washington D.C. and entered the Wayland Seminary School in 1878. He chose to teach and after graduating in 1881, he returned to Augusta County. He began his career by securing a position at the Smoky Row School in Staunton from 1881 to 1883. He was then appointed the principal of West End School in Staunton which he supervised for fifteen years. In 1888, he married Serena Johnson who also was a teacher.

Willis Carter was a natural leader and became involved in politics. He served as president to the Augusta County Teachers' Association from 1886 to 1888. Both husband and wife were active in promoting civil rights for blacks, demanding equal education, and encouraging blacks to join the Republican Party. From 1892 to 1896, Carter was the editor of the *Staunton Tribune*, a black newspaper that called for the end to lynching and asked blacks to vote. He went to St. Louis in June 1896 as an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention where he was disheartened to see how black delegates were shoved aside during the nominating process.

Despite his best efforts, he watched Virginians rewrite their constitution to disfranchise blacks and turn back the clock on the new freedoms blacks had won. His call for equal education and the right to vote went unheeded as Jim Crow laws were put into place.

Carter died in 1902 from tuberculosis and was buried in the Fairview Cemetery, the black cemetery of the city.

### Sources:

Heinrich, Robert and Harding, Deborah. *From Slave to Statesman: The Life of Educator, Editor, and Civil Rights Activist Willis M. Carter of Virginia*. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge: 2016.

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([http://www.1va.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Carter\\_Willia\\_McGlascoe](http://www.1va.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Carter_Willia_McGlascoe), accessed January 20, 2017.