



A history class at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1902 learns about Native Americans and Captain John Smith.

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BUILT ON FORGIVENESS

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

The Tuskegee Institute — a famed college for African Americans — was founded as a vocational school and teacher's college that would provide an education and improve job prospects for Black residents of Alabama.

But the deal that created the school was made between a local Black leader and a needy white politician — one who had been a colonel in the Confederate army.

The school opened as the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers on July 4, 1881 — 145 years ago this summer.

LAUNCHING A COLLEGE ON A SHOESTRING BUDGET

Alabama state Rep. Arthur Brooks and state Senator W.F. Foster — both Democrats — were in trouble. They were both running for reelection in the 1880 election but faced strong Republican opponents.

Foster made what was a most unusual deal for the time and for that region: He approached a local Black leader — Lewis Adams, a former slave and a Republican — and asked him to deliver the Black vote in majority Black Macon County for Brooks and Foster. If he'd do that, the two incumbents would see to it that the state legislature would found a school for Black teachers.

It was unusual enough that two Democrats would seek help from a man who supported Republicans, but this was even stranger: Foster was a former colonel in the Confederacy.

erate army. So this deal required quite a bit of forgiveness — to say the least — on Adams's part.

Adams agreed to the bargain and Foster and Brooks won reelection. Then, Foster and Brooks fulfilled



The plan for the new school was to train Black teachers and also provide vocational training for African Americans. Adams and an associate — George W. Campbell, a former slaveowner — hired Booker T. Washington to run the school. Washington was just 25 years old but had earned great respect as a teacher at Virginia's Hampton Institute.

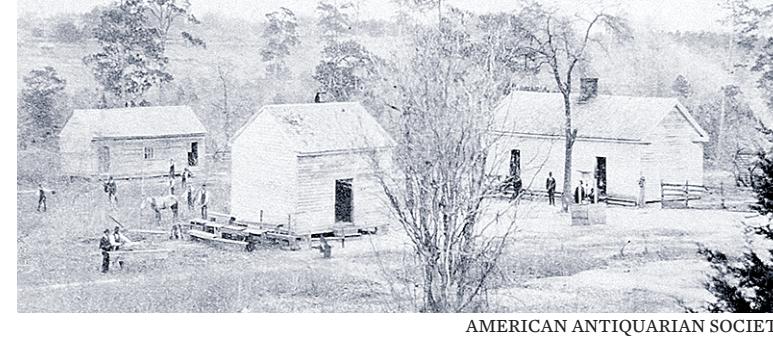
By 1906, the Tuskegee Institute campus had grown to 2,300 acres. It employed 156 instructors and was attended by 1,590 students. Among the distinguished educators Washington brought in was George Washington Carver of Iowa State College. Carver would teach at Tuskegee for 47 years, popularizing methods of crop rotation and alternative cash crops for sharecroppers.

THE GROWTH OF THE TUSKEGEE SCHOOL

Washington was given no budget to buy instructional spaces. Classes began in 1881 with 30 students in a room donated by Butler Chapel AME Zion Church.

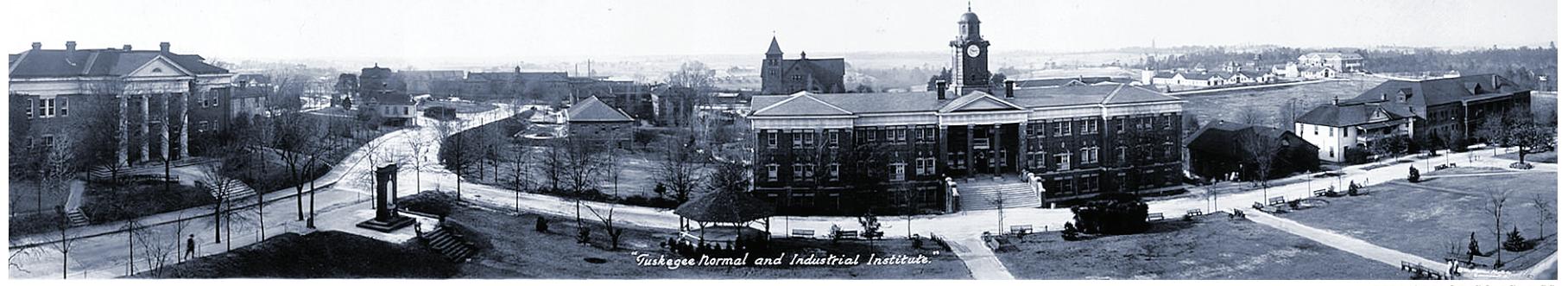


AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY



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Washington hit up industrialists Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, George Eastman and others for donations. In 1882, Washington bought this abandoned 100-acre plantation for \$200 and began to build a campus there.

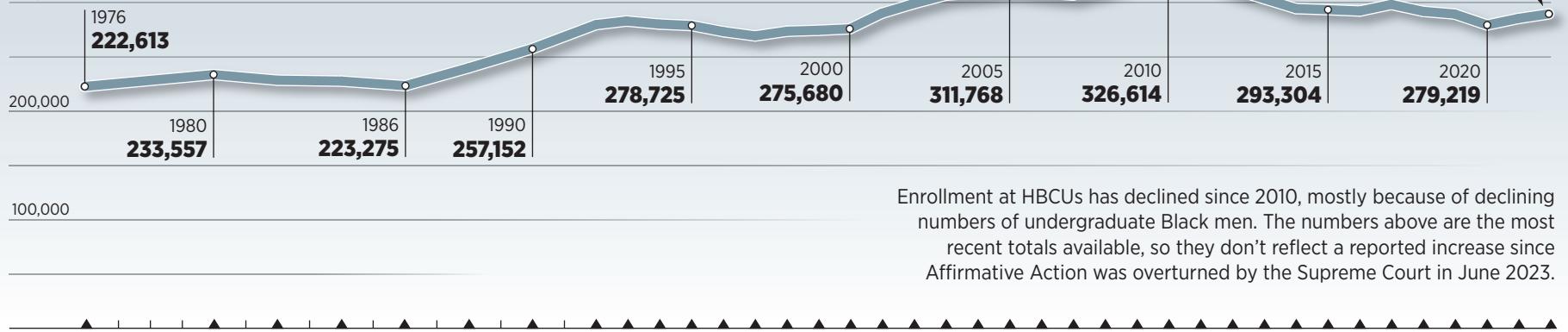


LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In 1884, the school opened a dormitory and dining hall for women — the first brick building on campus. In 1901, it opened the new Carnegie Library. Washington died in 1915. The next year, this panoramic photo was made to document the remarkable growth the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School.

ANNUAL HBCU ENROLLMENT

Total Fall enrollment in degree-granting Black colleges and universities



Enrollment at HBCUs has declined since 2010, mostly because of declining numbers of undergraduate Black men. The numbers above are the most recent totals available, so they don't reflect a reported increase since Affirmative Action was overturned by the Supreme Court in June 2023.