

# The Daily Tribune News



## Memories Day returns to George Washington Carver Park Saturday

Posted Thursday, February 14, 2019

By Marie Nessmith

Referred to as one of Bartow's jewels, George Washington Carver Park will take center stage during Saturday's fourth annual Memories Day. Taking place in the midst of Black History Month, the gathering that invites area residents to revisit "The Beach" will be presented by the Summer Hill Heritage Group and Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

"The purpose of Memories Day to me is for the community to rediscover George Washington Carver Park — at one time, the only state park for black people in northwest Georgia," said Calvin Cooley, president of the Summer Hill Heritage Group and a member of the Cartersville City Council. "As a child, that park was our story land, a place where our

dreams could soar. You could play all day with family and make new friends.

"... After the state stopped funding the park because of budget cuts, Bartow County bought the park. The name of the park was shortened from George Washington Carver to Carver Park. As time passed, the name George Washington was forgotten," he said, referring to the park initially honoring George Washington Carver, a well-known African-American scientist and inventor. "Young people of today and new residents had no idea that such a jewel existed in Bartow County. So, to make a long story short, the county and community members decided to change the name back to the original name. Memories Day was created to revitalize the park, increase visitation and enjoy the amenities the park has to offer."

Situated at 3900 Bartow Carver Road in Acworth, the venue opened as George Washington Carver State Park in 1950. The site was spearheaded by John Atkinson, a former Tuskegee Airman who served as Georgia's first black state park superintendent.

Operated by Bartow County government since 1975, the site's management was transferred to the Cartersville-Bartow County Convention & Visitors Bureau in 2017. The Acworth venue reclaimed its original name during the second Memories Day event.

Now leading the Summer Hill Heritage Group, Cooley graduated from Summer Hill High School in 1966. Providing education to African-American youth during segregation, Summer Hill's 1922 building and the Noble Hill elementary school were both built in part by the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

Cooley later retired in 2003 from The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. following 34 years of service. With this year's Memories Day, the 71-year-old looked back on his high school experiences for inspiration.

"I wanted to bring back the 'good old days' when almost every black high school in the area took their field trip to George Washington Carver Park," Cooley said. "So, I'm trying to invite all the former black high schools in the area to come and celebrate Memories Day with us. ... We want to celebrate memories of picnicking, music and swimming at the park.

“... This year, we have invited five high schools we use to play in sporting events to come share Memories Day with us. I don’t know how many will show, but we have gotten some favorable response from some of the old school alumni. We have a doctor/author from Emory University to speak on the history of black high schools,” he said, referring to Vanessa Siddle Walker, the Samuel Candler Dobbs professor of African American Educational Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. “Terry Howard will give a presentation on grants for historic projects, and of course we are going to have old school dancing and good food. Summer Hill High will be there in full force. Our teachers will be in attendance also.”

Echoing Cooley’s comments, Valerie Coleman — curator of Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center — also hopes Memories Day will help rekindle the public’s fascination with George Washington Carver Park.

“The purpose of the day,” she said, “is to celebrate local African-American history during Black History Month, and the civil rights fought by [John Atkinson], a former Tuskegee Airman whose dream was creating a park, with a beach and outdoor recreation, for black families to enjoy much as the white soldiers who came home to new highways and national parks and the idea of a travel vacation as a respite from work.

“This is history we celebrate, but much of it has disappeared. The state kept no official records of the events at these parks, and we hope to record and catalog as much information, recollections, photos and other items representative of the park and that era as possible, to let those stories live again for future generations to come.”