In Pursuit of Knowledge

As a young boy, George Washington Carver found himself going to great lengths to achieve what many of today’s youth take for granted—an education. Leaving home at the age of 11 or 12 (though Carver himself reports as early as age nine) with very little food and no plans of where to stay, is proof of George's longing to learn. In order to attend school, George had to work for his living and to pay his educational expenses. Having learned skills such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and other household chores from Susan Carver, George was able to secure several jobs to pay his way. Often while he worked, George would have his reader or speller propped up in front of him.

George was so dedicated to receiving an education that at one point he lived in a tiny room under the back steps of a house, saving every penny he earned working as a cook. When he had earned enough to carry him through one term of school, he quit the job and rented a lean-to shack behind the school. George allowed himself one dollar each week to live on, and by the end of the term he was broke. This cycle was repeated many times throughout George’s education. At Simpson College, after George had paid his $12.00 tuition, he had ten cents left. With this money, he bought cornmeal and beef suet which he used to sustain himself for some time until his laundry business was up and running. George bought the equipment for his laundry business on credit. During his time at Iowa State, George stretched his limited income by making clothes and selling lye hominy. His diet was supplemented by wild plants, mushrooms, and leftovers supplied by the campus cook. He collected his classmates used pencils stubs and saved cut-up wrapping paper to assist with his studies.

While in college, George found himself involved in various academic and social activities. He worked hard to pay his bills and studied to keep up his grades, never earning less than a B grade average. The following is a brief list of some of George’s activities while in college:

- Served as missionary chairman for the Young Mens’ Christian Association
- Organized the Agricultural Society
- Wrote the class poem and drew the class picture
- Quartermaster of Iowa State’s military division
- First trainer for the Iowa State football team
- Created decorations for banquets
- Played the guitar and gave lessons to classmates
- Member of the: Welsh Eclectic Society (debate club)
  German Club
  Art Club

George Washington Carver took many chances in his life, but there is one chance he refused to take. As evidenced through his pursuit for an education, George refused to take a chance on missing an opportunity. Throughout George’s life, he had a strong distaste for wastefulness, especially that of wasting of time.