

# **Thelma Fae Hilliard Smith Day Celebration**



**Education is the key to unlocking the golden door of freedom.  
George Washington Carver**

**Sunday, May 28, 2023  
2:00 p.m.**

**Reverend Edward O'Neal  
St. John Baptist Church  
1002 E Highway 64 Augusta, Arkansas**

**Sponsored by  
The James & Thelma Smith Foundation**

## **George Washington Carver Schools**

**“Mrs. Smith is a wise counselor, a conscientious public servant, a fine citizen, a dedicated and energetic educator, and a practical manifestant of high deals.”  
The Bearcat Staff, Erma Currie, Editor-in-chief**

Thelma Fae Hilliard-Smith was born to James Murray and Minnie Lee King Hilliard in 1910, the fourth of thirteen children in Fort Smith, Arkansas. She graduated from Lincoln High School. In 1931, she earned her Bachelor of Science in English with a minor in Latin from Knoxville College (a historical Black Presbyterian College). In 1965, she became the first African American woman to receive her Master of Arts in Teaching at Harding University. In 2021, Harding University–Cannon-Clary of Education established the Thelma Fae Smith Diversity in Education Scholarship to honor her distinguished education and community service career throughout Arkansas. The City of Augusta also recognized her for her dedicated years of service to the George Washington Carver and Augusta High Schools.

Her teaching career began at Howard High School in Fort Smith, Arkansas. She later worked at Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1936, she joined her husband, “Professor” James M. Smith Sr., at the Augusta Colored School (George Washington Carver Schools), where he was the principal, and she served as the de facto assistant principal. At that time, no high school existed for black students, so the Smiths devised and implemented a plan to add the 6<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grades to ensure their students had an equal opportunity to progress and excel academically and professionally, especially in education. The first high school graduating class was produced in 1947, creating first-generation college students and outstanding citizens who flourished in their given professions throughout other communities in the United States. Many Carver graduates returned to their alma mater to teach. And Carver Schools employed numerous black professional educators from across the state and country to teach.

Thelma taught at Carver Schools until it was consolidated with Augusta High School and remained there until her retirement in 1975. After retirement, she served the community as the Secretary of the Arkansas State Educations Association, Secretary to the Arkansas of the Woodruff County Retired Teachers Association, and other district teachers committees. She was a deaconess and organist for St. John Baptist Church. She taught veteran soldiers high school English courses to obtain their GED. And she taught and promoted spiritual and academic enrichment, music appreciation, and social grace to her grandchildren and other youth from Augusta to prepare them to be the next generation of leaders. She was known for her yearly piano recital, where she invited the community to her home on 711 Main Street to hear her students present and perform world-renowned classical music, such as “Ava Maria,” and have tea and crumpets.

In addition to her work, she was the mother of six children (James Madison Jr, Thomas Sherman, Wattie Lee, William Talmadge, Terral Lee, and Jerral Lynn). Of the six, two sets of twins were born 16 months apart. During her later years, she reinforced her dedication to her family and husband, Professor Smith, by serving as his primary caretaker for over 10 years before her health began to decline.

Her legacy of spirituality, selfless service, social grace, and excellence was for the betterment of all. She will be forever known in the hearts of the people she touched for her tremendous work and sacrifice.

**Program**

**Called to Order**

**Mistress of Ceremony.....Rose Smith (Granddaughter)**

**Prayer**

**History and Purpose.....Hilliard Andres Blevins (Grandson)**

**Proclamations.....Mayor Jeff Collins**

**Music Selection.....Annie Dinwiddie-White**

**Remarks**

**Family..... Thelma Fae Smith**

**Carver Schools National President..... Essie Nichols**

**Harding University..... Tiffany Byers**

**Family.....Erica Smith**

**Augusta Schools.....Dr. Steve Collier**

**Community.....“Lift Every Voice and Sing”**

**Closing Prayer**



## **“Oh, Carver”**

Oh, Carver, we'll always live,  
To boost and praise your name;  
Our school, we love, we'll always fight,  
For Carver and her aims.

Oh, Carver, we pledge to thee.  
A world of loyalty,  
To keep thee ever in our hearts,  
A school of memories.



## **“Lift Every Voice and Sing” The Black National Anthem (1900)**

Lift every voice and sing,  
Till earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

**The James & Thelma Smith Foundation wishes to express our heartfelt gratitude for your many acts of love from everyone near and far who continues to immortalize the impact of James & Thelma Smith in Augusta, Arkansas, to the world. May their spirit of a better tomorrow instruct the people of today. Be blessed and safe as you reflect and travel home.**