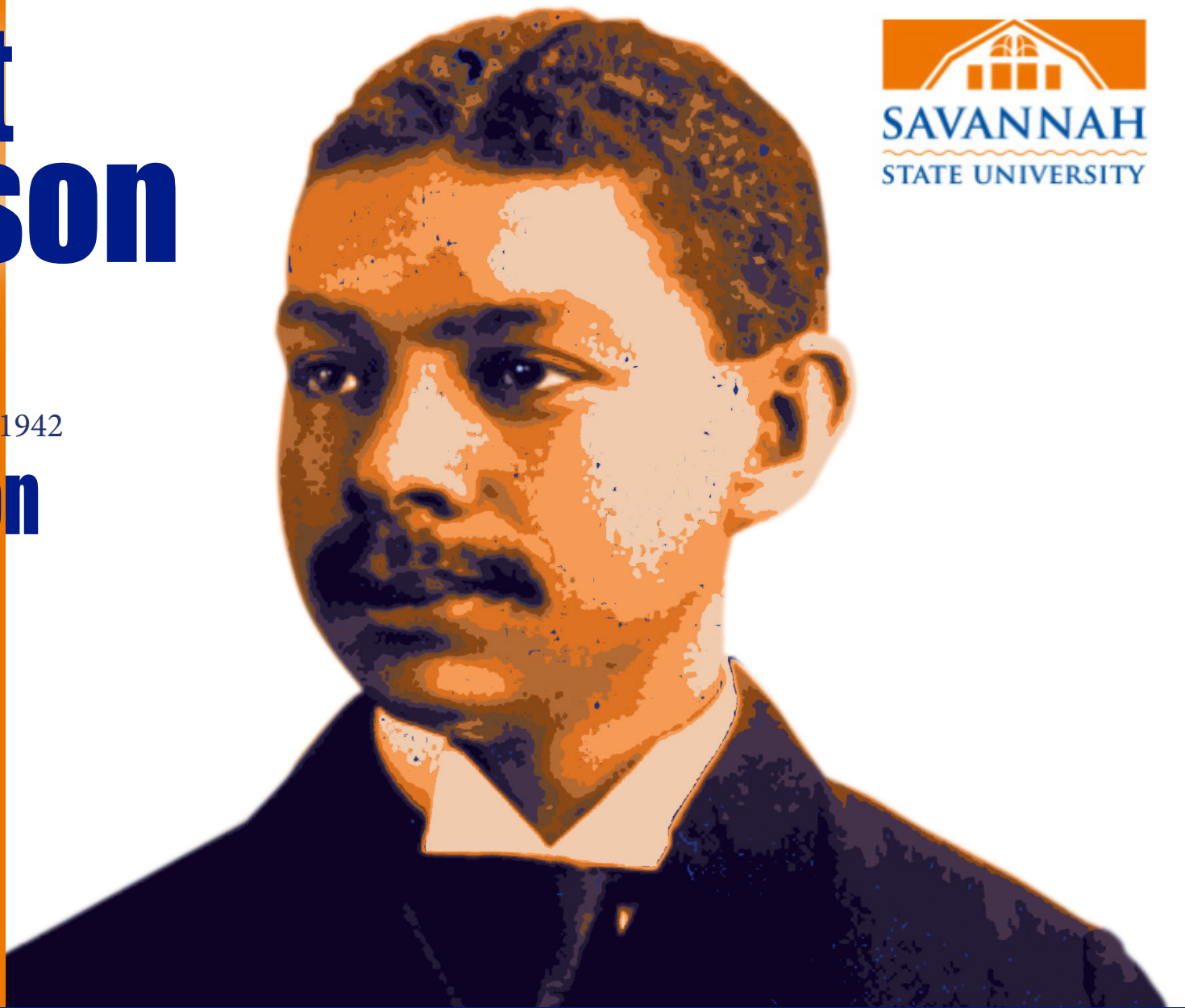


# Robert Robinson Taylor

June 8, 1868 – December 13, 1942

## Creative Vision



“It is my goal to work as much as possible and be as unknown as possible.” Robert Robinson Taylor

**R**obert Robinson Taylor became the first African American graduate of MIT in 1892 near the top of his class. He went on to become the architect of most of the buildings at the Tuskegee Institute. Utilizing the **soft skill of creative vision**, he was able to reach his goals. Although Taylor was not the namesake of the buildings he designed, nor did he pour the foundation and lay all of the bricks; he had the creative vision, and the final output required a team to bring his designs to reality.

Robert Robinson Taylor was born on June 8, 1868. His father, Henry, freed in 1847, was the son of a white slave owner and an African mother resulting in enough freedom before the Civil War to allow Henry to go into business for himself as a carpenter, and he became very successful at doing so.

The prosperity of his family allowed Robert the ability to focus on learning, in which he excelled. He started at the *Williston School*, then the *Gregory Normal Institute*, a school for Africans. After graduating, he worked with his father, learning the basics of the building trade. They decided MIT was the best architecture program available and the first formalized architecture program in the world operating within a university structure, and he was accepted.

He faced prejudice as a Southerner at MIT but seemed to have adjusted well academically. Taylor proved his potential

through his hard work and performance and earned a *Loring Scholarship* for two years, possibly as the first recipient of that honor. During Taylor's time at MIT, he had talked with Booker T. Washington, founder of the *Tuskegee Institute*, a school created by and for African Americans that had started as a teacher-training school with a small grant from the state of Alabama. After exploration of other opportunities, Taylor finally decided to accept Washington's offer for a position at Tuskegee.

At Tuskegee, Taylor arguably made his greatest contribution, designing and directing construction of forty-five buildings on the campus between 1900 and 1913. However, his favorite building was the Chapel, which was constructed between 1895 and 1898 using bricks made by students and constructed by students. Taylor also served as the director of the *Department of Mechanical Industries*, and then became vice-principal of the *Tuskegee Institute* in 1925. Taylor designed buildings for other institutions, churches, office buildings and homes as well.

He frequently returned to Tuskegee and was attending a service in the Chapel, when he collapsed on December 7, 1942 at the age of 74. He died that same day at the *John A. Andrews Memorial Hospital* — ironically, a building he also designed.

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How are you using creative vision to meet your goals at SSU in preparation for your future?