

1 The honey-pod tree, which once stood near Gloucester Court House in the middle of Main Street, shaded the slave block where many of Walker's own relatives had been sold. Walker's autobiography, published in 1958, was titled "The Honey-Pod Tree: The Life Story of Thomas Calhoun Walker." While Walker would live to see both the tree and the slave block destroyed, he went on to live through what he called "honey-pod tree moments," or times in life that were unfair, that would set you back, that you had to overcome. In life there are always honey-pod trees and he never wanted to forget that. It is in the fighting to overcome, in the work to move beyond, that you can truly tear down all the honey-pod trees and achieve your goals.

2 History shows us that as a lawyer, Walker sought to defend injustices to African Americans. It was in this moment that Walker was motivated to pursue justice. In this scene, Walker had graduated from Hampton Institute and was back in Gloucester teaching and helping his father build a house and farm. One day, while walking downtown, he ventured inside the courthouse as 14-year-old Mary Manly was tried for housebreaking (burglary). Ultimately she was found guilty and sentenced to two years in prison. Walker then and there decided to become a lawyer, determined to never let something like that happen again.

3 It was not enough for Walker himself to get an education and make a difference in his own life. He wanted that for everyone. Walker was known to spend time on Main Street, cane in hand, tapping and pointing at folks. Get busy, he would say. Don't let anything stop you. Persevere. Have faith. Get an education. Your life is in your hands...and will be what you make of it.

4 A pastor of pastors. Walker conducted religious teachings to enable the people of Gloucester County to have a better understanding of the Bible. His faith formed his code of ethics and guided all the work he did in his life. So much so, in fact, that he felt the calling to bring that faith to as many people as he could. In the mural, there are five churches, showcasing that from the one church his family belongs to, five additional churches were created.

5 While Walker and his wife, Annie, had three daughters of their own, they also took children into their home to raise them. Illustrated here is an imagined moment of the Walkers with children around a table, showcasing his belief that with the love of family, and an education, there is no stopping you. Education and supporting children was so important that he devoted himself to fundraising for better schools. In 1888, Walker helped raise funds to build the Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School in Capahosic, the region's first high school for Black students. In 1919, he travelled to Chicago to meet with philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, CEO of Sears, Roebuck & Co. He personally convinced Rosenwald to partner with Gloucester's African American community to build six public schools and a teachers' home to improve education for Black children. Rosenwald funded more than 5,300 elementary and training schools in partnership with local communities. About 10% of these Rosenwald Schools remain nationwide, including one in Gloucester — the Woodville School.

6 The importance of property ownership and education were among the two strongest pieces of advice Walker gave and fought for. He owned and lived in a house on Gloucester Main Street, which remains there today, owned by Hampton University. Walker is also remembered for helping the county earn the highest rate of Black home ownership in the country by 1930.

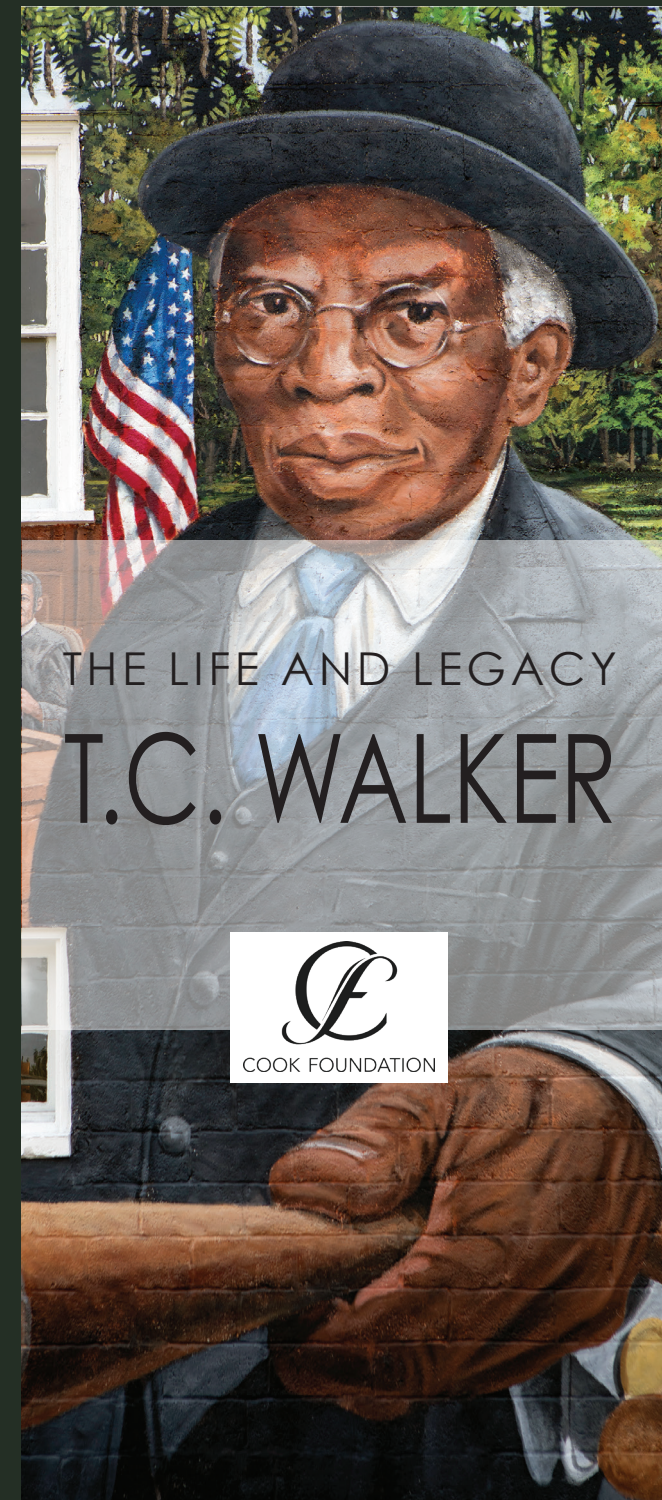
7 Growing up, Walker's mother and grandmother often feared that they would not have enough food to help them survive through the winter. After completing his studies at Hampton Institute, Walker returned to Gloucester and helped show people how to more effectively grow their own food. You don't need to just be able to survive the winter, but everyone should be able to provide for themselves. Being able to cultivate and provide for yourself, being dedicated to getting an education and working toward owning your own property were hallmarks of his mentorship and guidance.

8 The Gloucester Training School became the first public high school for Black students in Gloucester County. In 1921, Walker and others constructed a two-story wooden building for the school with gifts from the Rosenwald Fund and other national and local donors. The original building was replaced with a brick structure in 1951. With the integration of schools and subsequent reorganizations, the later building functioned as Gloucester Intermediate School in the late 1960s, Gloucester Middle School in the mid-1970s and from 1986 to 2012 was the Thomas Calhoun Walker Elementary School.

9 When Walker was 13, his father told him he was too old to learn. A Sunday school teacher would go on to give him a spelling book so he could learn to read and write on his own. One day, while in the post office, a doctor came in to check his mail. He opened an envelope, pulled out the letter and dropped the envelope to the ground. Walker picked up the envelope and saw writing he had never seen before – cursive instead of block letters. He took the envelope down to the creek and practiced writing the letters he saw on the envelope over and over again in the sand until he could decipher what the cursive letters were. "Dr. Tabb" was what he wrote, and in this transitional and monumental moment of his life, Walker realized he could in fact still learn.

10 With \$2.25, saved penny by penny for months by Walker and his mother, Walker made his way from Gloucester to Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, in search of a higher education. By the time he arrived, he only had 92 cents left. While denied admission because he could not pass the entrance exam, Walker persuaded the school to make an exception. In exchange for working on campus during the day, Walker attended classes at night. Among Walker's first teachers was Booker T. Washington.

FUN FACT: See if you can find hidden fun in the mural! Artist Michael Rosato has painted two arrowheads and one horseshoe into the mural. Can you find them?



THE LIFE AND LEGACY T.C. WALKER



COOK FOUNDATION

“ It’s the life story of T.C. Walker and starts when he was a boy, a child, until he reaches his later years. It’s a remarkable story. My goal with the mural is to get you to really know, on a more in-depth level, all the things that made T.C. Walker, T.C. Walker.

-Artist Michael Rosato ”



Known as Virginia’s “Black Governor,” Thomas Calhoun (T.C.) Walker was a teacher, lawyer, and government official. Born a slave less than a year before President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Walker grew up to become the first African American to practice law in Gloucester County. In 1891, he was elected to the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors and in 1934 President Roosevelt appointed Walker as the advisor and consultant of Negro affairs for the Virginia Emergency Relief Administration.