

**Title** – Thomas Calhoun Walker (1862-1953): The “Black Governor of Virginia”

**Program of Study** – Elementary Education

**Presentation Type** – Physical Poster

**Subtype** – Textual or Investigative

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### **Abstract**

This poster serves to highlight the life and accomplishments of Thomas Calhoun Walker. He was born into slavery on a small farm in Gloucester County, Virginia, on June 16, 1862. A few months after Walker’s birth, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, but it would take over three years for Walker’s family to be reunited after their emancipation. Following his family’s reunification, Walker was determined to earn an education despite all odds, studying under Booker T. Washington by night until he graduated from the Hampton Institute in 1883. Walker returned to Gloucester to become a teacher for black children of the county, and he received an overwhelming number of students who desperately wanted to learn. In 1887, Walker became the first black lawyer in Gloucester County. He dedicated his caseload to defending blacks in the Gloucester community, particularly black children who were trapped in the legal system. In 1891, Walker’s influence in his community shifted to politics upon his election to the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors. During the Great Depression, Walker earned his nickname “Black Governor of Virginia” by working alongside the federal government to provide black Virginians with basic needs. Thomas Calhoun Walker died on November 5, 1953, at the age of ninety-one, but his legacy continued. He was revered for his numerous contributions to education, law, politics, and the Civil Rights

Movement. Amidst the generational strongholds and injustices he faced, he impacted the lives of those in his community for decades to come. Walker served as a practicing attorney in the state of Virginia, fulfilling his Christian duty to serve his community as a lawyer until his death.

Although he held government positions at the state and federal levels, Walker always maintained his heart for Gloucester, Virginia.