

African American Heritage Trails Tour



This tour was created during Gloucester County's 350th Anniversary Celebration and was made possible by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy.

Pen and Ink drawings by Harriet Cowen, a resident of Bena, and home portrait artist. Harriet volunteered her time and talents to help bring these historic sites to life. We thank you Harriet and we miss you.



A driving tour of Selected African American Historic sites in Gloucester County, Virginia.

Soon after the settlement of Jamestown, Gloucester County was formed from York County in 1651. The African American presence then and throughout the last 350 years is being celebrated during the County's Anniversary in 2001 and beyond. This heritage has significantly influenced the County's development and culture and the overall African American cultures. We hope that you enjoy and are enriched by the information on this tour.

Thomas Calhoun Walker

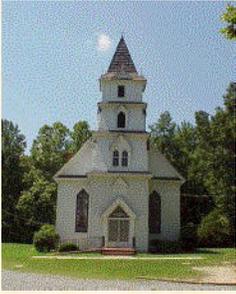
Born a slave in 1862, Thomas Calhoun Walker became the first black man to practice law in Gloucester county and some historical accounts suggest the first in Virginia. His



T. C. Walker's home today.
Location 6739 Main Street

many achievements are summarized on a marker in front of his home which reads..."Here lived Thomas Calhoun Walker the first black to practice law in Gloucester County and a civil rights spokesman who vigorously advocated education and land ownership for blacks. Mr. Walker was elected for two terms to Gloucester's Board of Supervisors, serving from 1891 to 1895. President William McKinley appointed him the Commonwealth's first black collector of customs in 1893. He became the only black to hold statewide office in President Roosevelt's Works Project Administration when he was appointed Consultant and Advisor on Negro Affairs in 1934."





Zion Poplars Baptist Church

Established in 1886, Zion Poplars Baptist Church is one of the oldest independent African American congregations in Gloucester County. The founding mothers and fathers first met for religious services under seven united poplar trees, four of which still stand on the church grounds.

The church building, which dates from 1894, is an excellent example of 19th-century gothic revival style with vernacular detailing. The spectacular interior of the church exhibits the creative craftsmanship of Mr. Frank Braxton, a former slave. Mr. Braxton, early congregants, their descendants, and war veterans are buried in the old and new cemeteries.

Like most independent black churches established during the Reconstruction era, Zion Poplars was a multifunctional institution, serving the spiritual, educational, and economic needs of its congregants and the larger community. That spirit of mutual aid persists among its current congregants, many of whom are descendants of Zion Poplars' founders. Zion Poplars Baptist Church is listed on the Virginia and National Historic Landmarks Registers.

Thomas Calhoun Walker Elementary School/Gloucester Training School



The present elementary school building stands on the site of the Gloucester Training School. The school was established in 1921 through the efforts of T. C. Walker and others as the first free public secondary school for black students in Gloucester County.



Gloucester Training School 1940s

Walker Elementary Today

As in the rest of the South, public education opportunities for blacks in Gloucester were limited in the early 1920s. While under the same administration as white schools, the separate black public schools received less funding, offered a shorter school year, and stopped at the seventh or even sixth grade level. In response to these conditions, lawyer Walker appealed to the school board, but was told that no money was available for secondary education of black

Main Building:
Dormitory, Library,
Principal's Office



A wide shot of Gloucester Training School Campus

students. Blacks were assumed to need only training in basic reading and writing. Mr. Walker led a fundraising effort for secondary school, donating the down payment himself.

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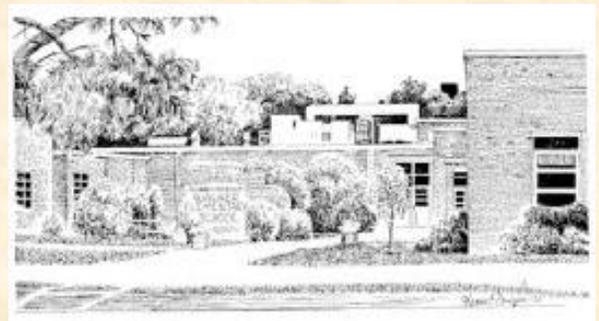
response to these conditions, lawyer Walker appealed to the school board, but was told that no money was available for secondary education of black students. Blacks were assumed to need only training in basic reading and writing. Mr. Walker led a fundraising effort for secondary school, donating the down payment himself.

The two-classroom Gloucester Training School (so named to reassure those in the white community who opposed publicly-supported higher education for black students) opened in 1921 with an eighth grade class, adding ninth grade the following year, and eventually expanding through the eleventh grade, with a campus of several buildings.



Gloucester Training School in the 1950s, photos courtesy of Tidewater Newspapers Inc.

In the early 1950s a new brick building was constructed to serve the entire county's black student population, grades one through eleven, and this new school was named for Thomas C. Walker. A twelfth grade was added by 1954. With the integration of schools and subsequent reorganizations, the present school functioned as Gloucester Intermediate School in the late 1960s, Gloucester Middle School in the mid-1970s, and since 1986 has been Thomas Calhoun Walker Elementary School, honoring the man instrumental in securing public secondary education for the black students of Gloucester.



Walker Elementary Today



Irene Morgan Story

In July 1944, a young mother named Irene Morgan (later Kirkaldy) boarded the Greyhound bus at the Old Hayes Store Post Office. A short time after boarding, and with additional passengers joining them, the driver ordered Mrs. Morgan and another black passenger seated next to her to give up their seats so that whites might be seated. Mrs. Morgan refused. After warning that he would have her arrested, the driver called upon the sheriff in Saluda (Middlesex County). The sheriff boarded the bus with a warrant, but Mrs. Morgan threw the warrant out the window and kicked the sheriff. She was eventually arrested by a deputy and jailed.

Enlisting the help of the State Conference of the NAACP, Irene Morgan appealed her case through the local, state, and Supreme courts. Her lawyers, Thurgood Marshall and William Hastie, argued that it was a burden to interstate commerce for each state to have its own rules for seating passengers on



Photo of area known as "The Hook."



Drawing of Hayes Post Office

interstate buses. The Supreme Court ruled in Mrs. Morgan’s favor in June 1946.

A song written soon afterwards declared, "You don’t have to ride Jim Crow, ‘cause Irene Morgan won her case!" Unfortunately, the victory was not so clear-cut. A courageous group of black and white men attempting to test the ruling met with mixed responses as they rode buses into the south; in the absence of state laws, bus companies created their own Jim Crow rules. Nonetheless, Irene Morgan’s stand for equal treatment paved the way for Rosa Parks to take a similar stand on a Birmingham city bus eleven years later.

Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School, Cappahosic



Photo of where the entrance to Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School was.

Founded by local black residents under the leadership of lawyer T. C. Walker and William B. Weaver, the Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School was the first black secondary school in the county, possibly the first in Virginia. It opened in 1888 with four students in a vacant store in Cappahosic; by 1896 seventy students studied, and many boarded, on its campus with two newly constructed buildings. From 1891 until its closing in 1933, the school was funded by the American Missionary Association, an agency of the northern Congregational Church.

William G. Price, a member of the Hampton Institute class of 1890 (and classmate of Dr. Robert R. Moton), served as principal of the school from 1899 until 1933. Under his leadership, the school produced farmers trained in the latest agricultural techniques, teachers for black public schools and many students who went on to college at Hampton and elsewhere. Its academic program, despite the school’s name, expanded to offer four years of English (including black writers), four years of Latin and German, two years of French, four years of math (through trigonometry), and three years of science. Orator Frederick Douglass, lyricist James Weldon Johnson and singer Marian Anderson were among the many notables who visited the school as part of its cultural enrichment program.



Mr. & Mrs. Price

The Great Depression of the 1930s was the downfall of Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial. Tuition become more of a burden to impoverished black families, who now at least had the option of sending their children to the free public Gloucester Training School. The resources of the American Missionary



Douglass Hall photo (top) and Gloucester Agricultural and Industrial School Campus (right) courtesy of Amistad Research Center at Tulane University—American Missionary Association Archives.

Association also declined, and without its support , the school closed. Portions of the entrance columns , an old bench, and the foundation of the cafeteria remain as witness to the dreams and opportunities nurtured here.



Moton Homeplace



A stately mansion on the banks of the York River at Cappahosic, Holly Knoll (also known as the Manor House) was built in 1935 as the retirement home of Dr. Robert R. Moton. Dr. Moton, the second president of Tuskegee Institute and the successor to Dr. Booker T. Washington, guided Tuskegee's progression from a normal school (teacher training school) into an accredited college and university.

Although he had served more than 50 years at Tuskegee and Hampton Institute, Dr. Moton's retirement was far from quiet. His famous invitation "Come to Cappahosic" brought many friends and fellow citizens from near and far to discuss and resolve problems, particularly in the field of education.

After Dr. & Mrs. Moton's deaths in 1940, the Moton Conference Center was established to continue Dr. Moton's work in education. Dr. Frederick Patterson, Dr. Moton's son-in-law and successor at Tuskegee, expanded the site into a full conference center by adding residential space and training facilities. During the 1950s and 60s plans were made for the economic development of historically black colleges and universities, while a "think tank" continued from Dr. Moton's days on social justice and other issues. The United Negro College Fund was conceived here, and strategies were planned for desegregation of lunch counters. On a bench under the 400-year-old live oak, Dr. Martin Luther King is said to have drafted the "I Have A Dream" speech.



Manor House, a national and state historic landmark, is now the private residence of Debra and Ben Alexander. The Alexander's have renamed the Center Legacy to reflect their belief that they have been entrusted with a historical resource valuable to all Americans, especially African Americans.

Bethel Baptist Church



Once known as the Old Sassafras Stage Church, Bethel Baptist Church is the oldest independent African American congregation in Sassafras. Bethel dates from the 19th century, when Sassafras Stage and nearby Allmond's Wharf were at the peak of their activity as hubs of commerce and transportation.

Bethel was one of several black Baptist churches founded during the Reconstruction era. In 1867, Dr. L. Catlett Stubbs donated one acre of land to his formerly enslaved butler, James F. Lemon. Mr. Lemon and other pious individuals used the land for their church, first



meeting on crude benches under bush arbors, then constructing a small but well-built church with an altar railing, pulpit, and gallery.

The present church dates to 1889. The chairmen of the building committee were carpenter George Leigh and bricklayer/plasterer Thomas Calhoun Walker, Sr. (father of lawyer T.C. Walker, who is buried in the cemetery next to Bethel Church).

Five daughter churches developed as offshoots from the Bethel congregation: New Mount Zion, Mt. Gilead, Smithfield, Shepherdsville, and Morning Glory (all located in Gloucester, with the exception of Mt. Gilead in Williamsburg). Governor George Allan officially recognized Bethel Baptist Church as a historic landmark in 1997.



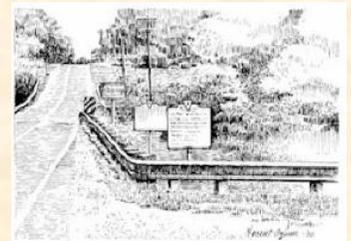
An early photo of Bethel Baptist Church, notice the car parked on one side of the church and the horse parked on the other.

The Servants Plot



During the summer of 1663, indentured servants (held for several years of service) in the Poropotank River and Purtan Bay region plotted an insurrection against their masters to occur on 13 September 1663. It was prevented when John Berkenhead, servant of Maj. John Smith of Gloucester County, informed the authorities of the planned uprising. As a reward for “his honest affection of the preservation of this Country” the Virginia House of Burgesses, on 16 September, granted Berkenhead his freedom and gave him 5,000 pounds of tobacco. Additionally the Burgesses proclaimed that 13 September would hence forth annually be “kept holy.”

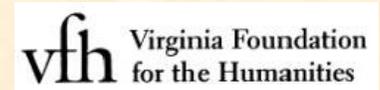
While this event is included in several accounts of African American History, other accounts suggest that black servants were not involved in this conspiracy. There is little information concerning the details of this event and there are convincing arguments for both accounts. This incident is dramatized in Mary Johnston’s novel *Prisoners of Hope*. The plot of 1663 may have been the first serious conspiracy involving black servants.



Thank you for your interest in Gloucester County’s African American history. This tour was a project of the Gloucester County 350th Celebration Committee. For more information please contact us at:

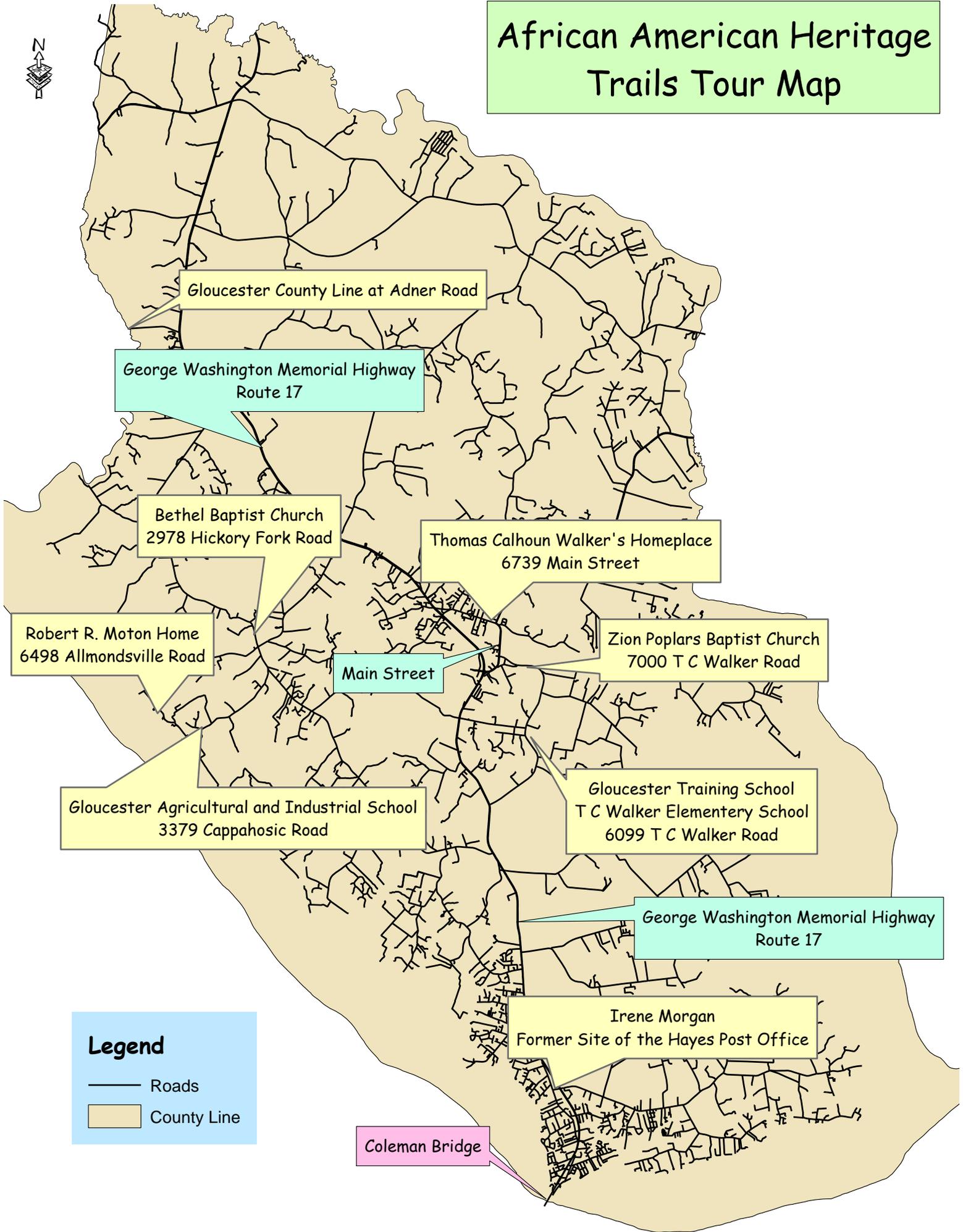
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African American Heritage Trails Tour Map



Legend

- Roads
- ▭ County Line