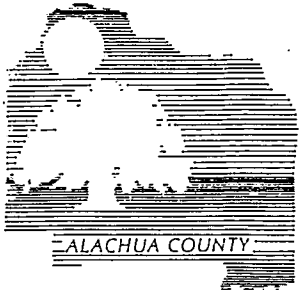


# ALACHUA COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION



You are cordially invited to the  
DEDICATION OF THE HISTORIC MARKER  
FOR  
JOSIAH T. WALLS

APRIL 16, 1989

SUNDAY

2:30 PM

UNIVERSITY AVENUE and N.W. FIRST STREET

Parking Lot, Florida National Bank

Gainesville

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Josiah T. Walls, born in Virginia in 1842, served with the Union Army in Florida in 1864-65. After the conclusion of hostilities, he settled in Newnansville, his wife's home. He moved to Gainesville in 1870.

Entering Florida politics, Walls served in the State House and the State Senate in 1868, and in 1869. Running on the Republican Party ticket, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1870. At that time Florida had only one U.S. Representative. Walls' election made him the first black Congressman ever from Florida. He was re-elected in 1872 and 1874.

In 1873 Walls purchased a 1175 acre farm on the western edge of Paynes Prairie. That same year he also purchased the newspaper, The New Era. Active in local politics, he served at various times as Mayor of Gainesville, a member of the School Board, and as a County Commissioner.

He was highly regarded for his successful farming operations in the 1880's, but the great freeze of the winter of 1894-95 brought financial ruin. Walls moved to Tallahassee to become farm director at the school now known as Florida A. and M. University. Walls died in Tallahassee in 1905.

The Pleasant Street Historic Society and the Florida National Bank joins with the Historical Commission in this recognition of an outstanding Alachua County citizen.

We invite you to join with us in a celebration of our County's heritage!

Refreshments following the dedication, courtesy of the Pleasant Street Historic Society and the Florida National Bank.

# Josiah T. Walls

Hon. Josiah T. Walls, of Florida, House of Representatives, May 7, 1874.

His speeches can be found in the U. of FL Law Library. Ask for US Congressional (under different name) Record of early years. Among other things, Walls proposed legislation for public education, railroads, and the first 4<sup>th</sup> of July Centennial Celebration.

From Wikipedia: **Josiah Thomas Walls** (December 30, 1842 – May 15, 1905) was a United States Congressman who served three separate terms in Congress between 1871 and 1876.

## Josiah T. Walls



**Member of the U.S. House of Representatives**  
from Florida's At-Large district

**In office**

March 4, 1871 – January 29, 1873

March 4, 1873 – March 3, 1875

**Preceded by** Charles M. Hamilton

**Member of the U.S. House of Representatives**  
from Florida's 2nd district

**In office**

March 4, 1875 – April 19, 1876

**Succeeded by** Jesse J. Finley

### **Personal details**

<b>Born</b>	Josiah Thomas Walls December 30, 1842 <u>Winchester, Virginia</u>
<b>Died</b>	May 15, 1905 (aged 62) <u>Tallahassee, Florida</u>
<b>Political party</b>	<u>Republican</u>

Josiah T. Walls

Josiah T. Walls was born in Virginia on December 30, 1842, probably of slave parents. He was impressed into the service of the Confederacy, but liberated by the Union Army to which he subsequently volunteered. After his medical discharge Walls followed a former lieutenant, W.K. Cessna, to Florida, and worked for awhile in Cessna's lumber company.

Next Walls became a teacher in Archer, but by 1868 he had moved to Gainesville and begun his political career. He was a delegate to the constitutional convention of 1868 and the same year was elected to the Florida House. By the next year he had moved to the Florida Senate and in 1870 he was elected for the first time to the United States House of Representatives. He was actually elected three times to the House but two of those elections were contested by his white opponents and after serving portions of those contested terms, he was each time unseated. Walls returned to the Florida Senate in 1877, and then ran one last time for the U.S. House in 1884 but this time was defeated.<sup>107</sup>

Walls and his wife, Ellen, lived in a home on the corner of West University and Pleasant Street, the later site of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>108</sup> When not in Tallahassee or Washington, Walls was extremely active locally in a multitude of roles. He was briefly mayor of Gainesville, a member of the county Board of Public Instruction, a

state assessor, Brigadier General of the Florida State Militia and president pro tem of the Board of Alachua County commissioners. In addition he published two different newspapers, The New Era and The Farmer's Journal, and opened a law firm in Gainesville with Henry Harmon and William Saunders to serve the Negroes of the county.<sup>109</sup>

In 1873 Walls purchased a 1,175 acre plantation known as Harrison's Landing which was described by Carl Webber in Eden of the South as "the best in the State."<sup>110</sup> It had two miles frontage on Alachua Lake and transport Steamers of the Alachua Navigation Company stopped there to pick up crops. On September 14, 1884, The Jacksonville Florida Times Union gave this description of Walls' plantation:

[Walls has] five hundred acres of land under cultivation, lives in one of the finest houses in the county and employs on his farm the year round from fifty to seventy-five hands. He also owns a sawmill in the operation of which he gives over twenty-five men constant employment. He also owns about 1,000 acres of land, a good portion of which is divided up into small lots upon which poor colored families are permitted to live, he furnishing them with seeds and the necessaries of life until their crops are made when he only requires from them a return of the money advanced and a nominal rental.

In Plat Book A, p. 35, in the Alachua County Courthouse, I found a map of the Walls estate surveyed on April 25, 1890, which is attached. The deed books in the courthouse record numerous transactions for both Walls and his wife

Ellen, who had to sign her deeds with a mark and then give a sworn statement that the sales were not made under duress. <sup>111</sup>

Walls was the acknowledged leader of the Republican party in Gainesville. He had been a delegate to the party's first statewide convention held in Tallahassee in 1867 and was still Chairman of the county executive committee of the party through 1890. He also was Florida's delegate to the National Republican convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1872.

And yet Walls still had time to participate in national Negro conventions such as the Southern States Convention held in Columbia, S.C., in 1871. At this convention he was temporary chairman and one of the vice presidents. In the heart of the South, and at the height of KKK terrorism, Walls had the audacity to recommend that the next National nominating convention of the Republican party name John Mercer Langston, director of the National Equal Rights League, as their vice presidential candidate. At the national Negro convention held the next year in Washington, D.C., he nominated another prominent Negro, lieutenant governor of Louisiana, P.B.S. Pinchback, for chairman.

After his unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. House in 1884 and another for the Florida Senate in 1890, Walls devoted himself to his farming but here too he met defeat.

A freeze in 1895 ruined him and he and his family moved to Tallahassee where he lived out his life as director of the farm at the Florida Normal College.<sup>112</sup>