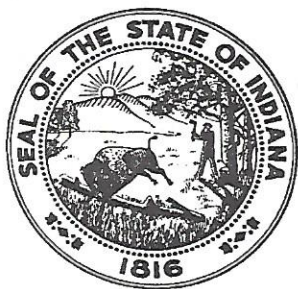


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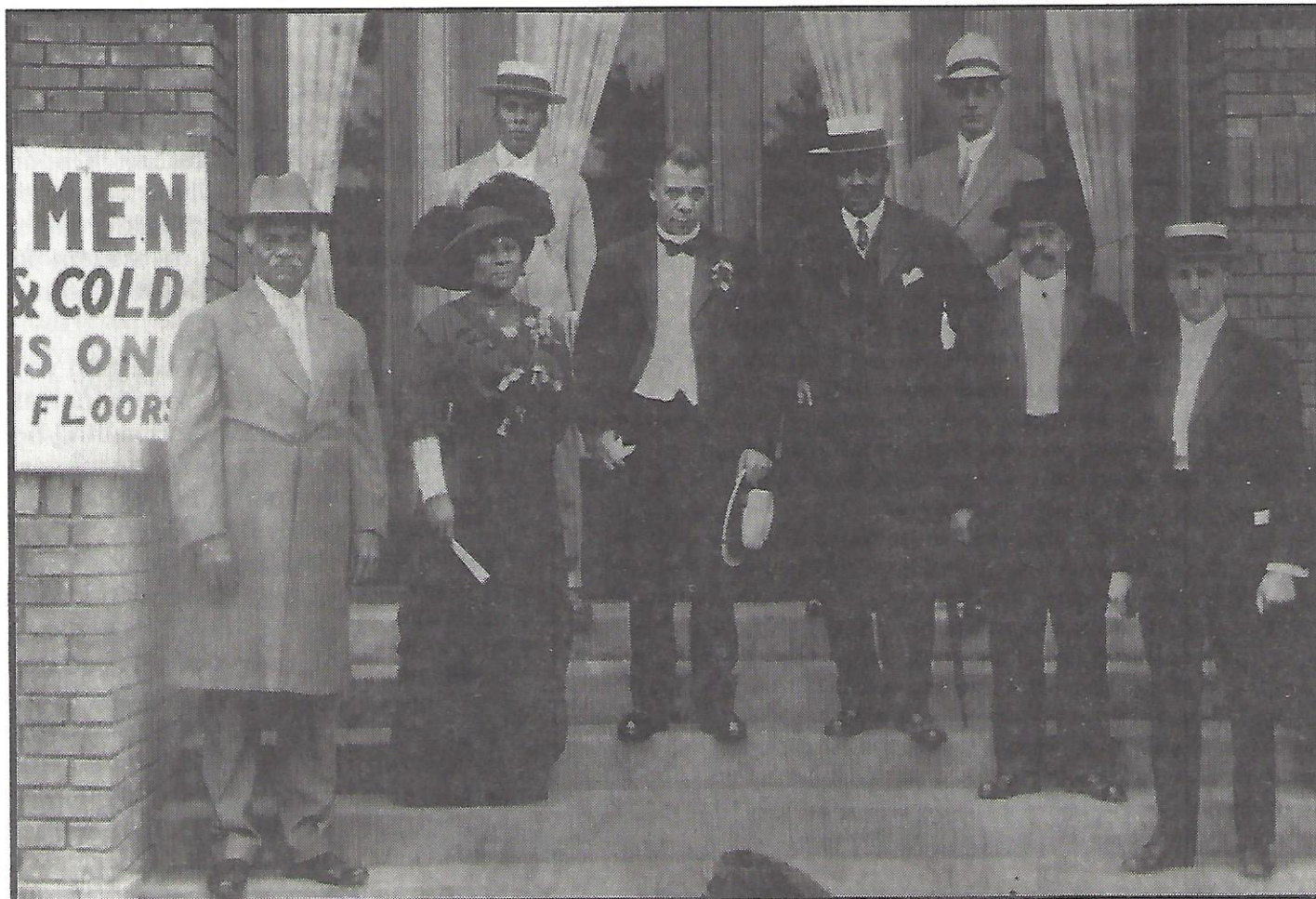


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Focus—Madam C. J. Walker

Madam Walker and Booker T. Washington (to her left, with his hat in his hand) pose with other dignitaries at the Indianapolis Senate Avenue YMCA dedication in 1913.
Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 2137.



Madam C. J. Walker: A Success Story



Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 2140.

Sarah Breedlove was born in 1867 in Delta, Louisiana, two years after the Civil War had ended. Her parents, now sharecroppers, had dreamed of freedom for a very long time, but their joy soon gave way to despair when they realized that freedom for former slaves brought little change to their lives. Laws had been passed giving blacks new rights, but often these laws were not upheld in the courts. The Breedloves always hoped for a better life for their three children, but they both died of yellow fever in 1874 leaving Sarah an orphan at age 7.

She went to Vicksburg, Mississippi to live with her older sister but married at age 14 to escape an unhappy home life. She gave birth to a daughter, Lelia, when she was 17 and was widowed by age 20. By 1887, blacks had made great

I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. I was promoted from there to the washtub. Then I was promoted to the cook kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground.

Spoken in 1912, by Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, better known as Madam C. J. Walker, a black businesswoman.

progress, but life was still very difficult, especially in the south. Sarah realized that her life would not improve if she stayed there.

She moved in 1887 to St. Louis, Missouri, and became a laundress. The next 20 years were filled with backbreaking labor for the miserable sum of \$1.50 a week. Somehow she managed to save enough money to send Lelia to school. Sarah never gave up hope for a better life and was determined to pull herself and her child out of poverty.

Always Look Your Best

Sarah had always believed that no matter how difficult life was, you should always *do* and *look* your best and have pride in yourself. When she began to lose her hair, she was naturally very upset. She tried various hair products, but nothing seemed to work. Then, Sarah learned that her brother had died and her sister-in-law wanted Sarah to come to Denver, Colorado, to live. The move was a turning point in Sarah's life.

Arriving in Denver in 1905 with \$1.50, Sarah got a job as a cook. She was still troubled by hair loss and experimented at night, mixing chemicals on the stove in her small attic apartment. Much to her delight, she discovered a formula that not only made her hair grow but left it thick and soft. Neighbors began asking how she got such beautiful hair and asked if they could buy the product. Opportunity was finally knocking on Sarah's door. She developed three products, a system for using them, and a special comb.

Business Begins

Sarah spent the next year going door to door demonstrating her system and selling her products. In 1906 she married a newspaper man by the name of Charles J. Walker. It was then that Sarah changed her name and the name of her company to Madam C. J. Walker.

Business was so good that she began to recruit black women, who were taught the special hair care system and sent out to sell the products. Many of these women opened

beauty shops in their homes. It was the first time that black women were given a chance to earn a living at a job other than cook, laundress, or maid.

Madam C. J. Walker was a good business woman and soon expanded her business to include mail orders. By 1908 she was making \$400 a month. This salary was unheard of for most white males, and it was incredible that a woman, a black woman at that, was able to make so much money. Convinced she could do even better, she moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where there were more people to buy her products.

The Move to Indianapolis

Madam Walker had her eye on Indianapolis as a good place to build her factory. When she visited in 1910, she was so warmly greeted by the black community and impressed with the many successful black businesses, that she chose to stay, making Indianapolis her national headquarters. Her factory employed only local black men and women.

Madam Walker outside her home in Indianapolis, c.1915.

Her factory was located behind her home.

Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, A 69.

Business Booms

By 1912, Madam C. J. Walker was divorced, her business employed 1,600 agents, and she was making \$1,000 a week. Putting all of her time and energy into her business, she traveled constantly, promoting her business and telling black audiences how they too could achieve success through determination and hard work. She encouraged individuals to better themselves with education and became a role model for black woman and a spokesperson for her race.

She moved to Harlem, New York, in 1916. By then she was an extremely wealthy woman and gave generously to black schools, organizations, and individuals. She also spoke out on political issues although she was unable to vote. In

1918, she became the first woman millionaire. Madam C. J. Walker died in 1919 at the age of 52, leaving a legacy of love and pride for her race that carries on today.

Source: Bundles, Madam C. J. Walker.

Activities

- If Madam Walker could visit your classroom today, what questions would you ask her?
- Make a poster illustrating events from Madam Walker's life.
- Write ten trivia questions about Madam Walker. Quiz your classmates with your questions.
- You are the editor of a book about famous people. Write an entry for Madam Walker or any other famous African-American.



The Harlem Renaissance

Renaissance means rebirth. That is exactly what happened to black creativity during the early decades of the 1900s. This was the time of the New Negro Movement, with political, social, and cultural impact. Black organizations were formed, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The center of all of this activity and change was an area of Manhattan, New York, called Harlem. During the period between 1919 and 1929 Harlem became a mecca for black painters, poets, musicians, and writers. At night the streets were alive with both blacks and whites, as they made their way to the many clubs to hear the biggest names in jazz, a new and distinctly black form of music. Lavish parties were held where these talented men and women met with New York's wealthiest and most influential people, who gave money and arranged showings and readings of their work.

The stock market crash of 1929 brought the Harlem Renaissance to an abrupt end. Many creative blacks, now without financial support,

found themselves, with the exception of a few, descending into obscurity. The Harlem Renaissance was over, but its legacy is a point of pride for all Americans.

Source: David Driskell, et al., Harlem Renaissance.

A'Lelia

A'Lelia¹ Walker Robinson, the only child of Madam C. J. Walker, was 34 when she inherited her mother's company along with a vast fortune. The year was 1919. Six years before, she had moved to Harlem, New York. This area was fast becoming the center of political and artistic growth for black Americans.

The year A'Lelia came into her money, Harlem began what was to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Anyone who was anyone, gathered there for fabulous parties where they could rub elbows with black poets, painters, and writers. Clubs were jumping, the jazz was hot, and in the middle of it all was A'Lelia Robinson.

A'Lelia used her great wealth to promote and present these talented black artists to the high society of New York. Her parties were events. She even turned her apartment into The Dark Tower, a club where the rich and famous gathered.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, A'Lelia's company was hit hard. Her extravagant lifestyle had begun to take its toll, both on her fortune and her person. Her extraordinary life ended in 1931 when she was only 46.

¹Lelia Walker changed her name to A'Lelia.

Sources: Lasseter, Margaret, "From log cabin to riverside mansion," Gannett Westchester Newspapers, August 20, 1989; Bundles, Madam C. J. Walker; David Driskell, et al., Harlem Renaissance.



A'Leita Walker Robinson.
 Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 3712.

Madam Walker's Road to Riches

- To get the word list for the word search puzzle at the bottom of the page, unscramble each group of letters below.
- Each group represents a city and state where Madam C. J. Walker lived.
- After you unscramble the places, circle the **cities** in the word search puzzle at the bottom of the page.

Aldet, Nsuiolaai

Gcrbivuks, Inspiissip

Ts Ulsio, Oimsusir

Vender, Dolorcoa

Butgrthips, Ynalepsnainv

Slpniniioaad, Aadinin

Mlaerh, Ewn, Kyro

D J Q V Q G W V I C K S B U R G J Q L V E L
 F S I G S Q A Q Z H N M N V E S T L O U I S
 R J D E L T A R S H A R L E M T U G X G A O
 W S I L O P A N A I D N I E D O M E J K E U
 W F N C A K N Y R M M P I T T S B U R G H B
 O R M V G A N E R E V N E D O L T B D S X Q
 Z L S B D G Y K K V R V W D S E I P F N C Y
 Y S Z P X R B N V G M W V P P V U E V C Y S

Answers: Delta, Louisiana; Vicksburg, Mississippi; St. Louis, Missouri; Denver, Colorado; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Indianapolis, Indiana; Harlem, New York

Blacks and Indiana History: An Overview

Sometimes history books do not tell the story of all the people living in a region or a state. This is so for the story of African-Americans in Indiana. Just as white American settlers moved into the new state of Indiana, so too did free black settlers because the 1816 Constitution prohibited slavery.¹ Most settlers—whatever their ethnic background—wanted to own land and be independent. Often, black settlers bought land for farms near Quaker communities which welcomed them. Sometimes they settled in Indiana towns along the Ohio River where work was plentiful.

However, the black pioneers in Indiana did not enjoy the same civil rights as their white neighbors. In spite of efforts by Quakers and others opposed to slavery, Indiana law—like laws in its neighbor states—prohibited free black men from voting, serving in the militia, and educating their children in public schools. Many white settlers and officials encouraged blacks to leave the state and colonize Liberia in Africa.

African-Americans continued to move into the state of Indiana until 1851. At that time, the new Indiana Constitution prohibited blacks from moving into the state. Laws passed to enforce the 1851 Constitution made life very difficult for blacks already in Indiana. As tensions between the North and South brought the Civil War to reality in 1861, conditions for free black residents of Indiana became hazardous. Many free blacks and escaping slaves moved to Canada where slavery had been abolished in the 1830s.

After the Civil War, many blacks left the South looking for jobs and a better way of life for themselves and their families. Indiana was one of their destinations. Most black families were not able to buy land for farms, but sought jobs in the cities and towns.

Federal and state laws were passed to provide access to schools, public accommodations, and transportation. In 1870 black men were given the right to vote. Many people ignored these laws, however, and prejudice and politics continued to make life very difficult for black Americans in Indiana and elsewhere.

During this same period, African-Americans created their own strong communities within Indiana's cities and towns. Usually separated from white businesses and residences, blacks built their own churches and schools, developed businesses, published newspapers, and organized into numerous clubs to improve themselves and to aid their neighbors. In 1910, Madam C. J. Walker moved into just such a community in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Although the numbers of blacks in Indiana may not seem very significant, population figures in 1850 show Indiana second only to Ohio in the percentage of black residents in the Northwest Territory states. Available figures from the U.S. Census of Population demonstrate the growth from 1850 to 1920 as Indiana became an industrialized state.

Date	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Total Population
1850	11,296	1.14
1860	11,428	0.84
1870	24,560	1.46
1880	39,228	1.98
1890	45,215	2.06
1900	57,505	2.28
1910	60,320	2.23
1920	80,810	2.76

¹Indentured servants and slaves can be documented in early Indiana in violation of this prohibition.

Sources: *Thornbrough, The Negro in Indiana; Thornbrough, Indiana in the Civil War Era; Phillips, Indiana in Transition.*