

Madam C.J. Walker

December 1983 Calendar and February 2000 Calendar

Sarah "Madam C.J." Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 on a Delta, Louisiana, plantation. Orphaned at age 7, she and her older sister survived by working in the cotton fields around Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Delta. At 14, she married Moses McWilliams to escape abuse from her cruel brother-in-law.

Her only daughter, Lelia (later known as A'Lelia Walker), was born on June 6, 1885. When her husband died two years later, she joined relatives in St. Louis, Missouri, saving enough money from her work as a washerwoman to educate her daughter.

Around the time of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, Walker began to suffer from a scalp ailment called alopecia, which caused her to lose her hair. She tried many products, including those of Annie Malone, another black woman entrepreneur.

In 1905 Walker moved to Denver as a sales agent for Malone, then married an old friend and newspaperman, Charles Joseph Walker. By early 1906 they had gone into business together, selling Madam C.J. Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower, a scalp-conditioning formula. To promote her products, Walker traveled for a year and a half throughout the South, selling her products door to door, demonstrating her



scalp treatments in churches and lodges, and devising sales and marketing strategies. In 1908, she temporarily moved her base to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she opened Lelia College to train Walker hair culturists. By early 1910, she had settled in Indianapolis, where she built a factory, hair and manicure salon, and another training school.

In 1916 Walker moved to New York, leaving the day-to-day operations of the Mme. C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company in Indianapolis. She quickly became involved in Harlem's social and political life, taking special interest in the NAACP's anti-lynching movement, to which she eventually contributed \$5,000.