



National Coalition of  
100 Black Women Inc.  
Oakland/Bay Area Chapter



# Madam C. J. Walker

## **BORN SARAH BREEDLOVE (1867 - 1919)**

Born on December 23, 1867 on a Delta, Louisiana plantation, this daughter of former slaves transformed herself from an uneducated farm laborer and laundress into one of the twentieth century's most successful, self-made women entrepreneurs. Orphaned at age seven, she often said, "I got my start by giving myself a start."

## **THE 1890's**

Sarah began to suffer from a scalp ailment that caused her to lose most of her hair. After experimenting with many homemade remedies and store-bought products, she founded her own business in Denver in 1906. Her third husband, Charles Joseph Walker, became her business partner and she adopted his name for her company. By early 1910, Madam Walker had settled in Indianapolis, then the nation's largest inland manufacturing center, where she built a factory, a hair and manicure salon, and her second beauty school. Less than a year after her arrival, Walker grabbed national headlines in the black press when she contributed \$1,000 to the building fund of the "colored" YMCA in Indianapolis. Walker moved to New York in 1916, leaving the day-to-day operations of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company in Indianapolis to two trusted employees, but continuing to oversee new business development.

## **IN HARLEM**

Once in Harlem, she quickly became involved in the city's social and political life, taking special interest in the NAACP's anti-lynching movement to which she contributed \$5,000. As her business continued to grow, Walker organized her agents into local and state clubs, founding the Walker Hair Culturists Union of America in 1917. That same year, she hosted the organization's first convention.

## **MAY 1919**

By the time Madam Walker died in May 1919 at her estate, Villa Lewaro in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, she had helped create the role of the 20th Century, self-made American business woman; established herself as a pioneer of the modern black hair-care and cosmetics industry; and set standards in the African-American community for corporate and community giving.

## **THE LEGACY**

Today Walker's legacy lives on through the Madam Walker Theatre Center, a National Historic Landmark, in Indianapolis, and through events like today's Oakland/Bay Area Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. Luncheon and Empowerment Forum. For more information, visit [www.madamcjwalker.com](http://www.madamcjwalker.com) and [www.walkertheatre.com](http://www.walkertheatre.com).