

# Maggie L. Walker

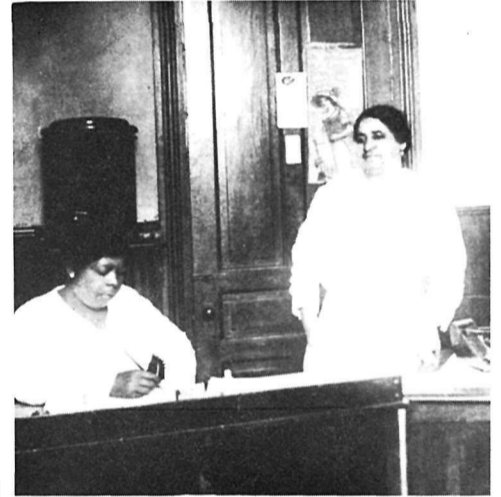
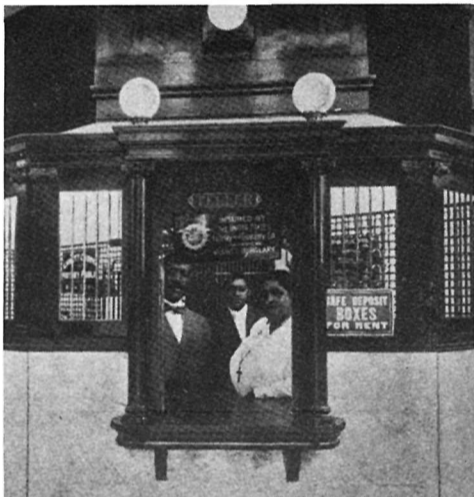
National Historic Site  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Maggie Lena Walker had a commanding presence. Her deep throaty voice often was heard calling greetings or presenting speeches. She rose to wealth, but she remained friendly and helpful. Despite

tremendous personal and business adversities, she campaigned for racial cohesiveness and improved economic conditions for blacks.



MAGGIE L. WALKER



## Achievements

When she was 14 years old, Maggie Mitchell joined the local Independent Order of St. Luke. This fraternal insurance society established in 1867 in Baltimore, Md. ministered to the sick and aged, promoted humanitarian causes, and encouraged individual self-help and personal integrity.

She served in numerous capacities of increasing responsibility for the order, from that of a delegate to the annual convention to Right Worthy Grand Secretary in 1899, a position she held until her death. Under her leadership the order's membership and numbers of councils were significantly increased and its finances achieved solvency. Through sound fiscal policies, a genius for public relations, and enormous energy, she took a

dying organization, gave it life, and helped it thrive.

The St. Luke Herald newspaper was established in 1901 under Mrs. Walker's editorship to promote closer communication between the order and the public. Two years later the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank was founded. She had earlier stated, "Let us put our money together; let us use our money; Let us put our money out at usury among ourselves, and reap the benefit ourselves." Mrs. Walker served as the bank's first president and later as chairman of the board of directors when it merged with two other banks to become Consolidated Bank and Trust Company. The bank survives today as the oldest continually black-operated bank in the United States.

It is across the street from its original location at

First and Marshall.

Besides her work for the order, Maggie Walker was active in civic groups. An advocate of black women's rights, she served on the board of trustees for several women's groups. Among them were the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and the Virginia Industrial School for Girls. In the area of race relations she helped organize and served as vice president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and as a member of the national NAACP board. She also served as a member of the Virginia Interracial Commission.

**FAMILY LIFE**



A Family Portrait

Maggie (Mitchell) Walker was born in Richmond, VA. to Elizabeth Draper near the close of the Civil War. Her mother, a former slave, was the cook's helper in the Van Lew Mansion. Later Elizabeth Draper and her husband William Mitchell moved their family to a small house in a downtown alley between Broad and Marshall, where Maggie and her brother Johnnie were raised. Widowed young, their mother, with the help of Maggie, supported the family by taking in laundry.

Maggie Mitchell was educated in Richmond public and normal schools. After graduation she taught school for three years. Her teaching career ended in 1886, when she married Armstead Walker Jr. This changed her focus to her family and the Independent Order of St. Luke, a black fraternal organization. Life was full and prosperous for the Walkers and their two sons, Russell Ecles Talmadge and Melvin Dewitt.

Tragedy struck in 1915 when Armstead Walker died, leaving Mrs. Walker to manage a large household. Her work and investments kept the family prosperous. As her sons married they brought their wives to 110½ East Leigh St. A major addition to the house in 1922 enabled her to continue providing a home for her sons and their families, her mother, and a companion-housekeeper. Her mother died in 1922 and her eldest son Russell in 1923.

In the wake of these sorrows Mrs. Walker's own health problems began to worsen. In 1928 Mrs. Walker was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. Despite her physical limitations she remained active until her death of diabetic gangrene on December 15, 1934.

**THE HOUSE**



The house at 110½ East Leigh St. was originally built in 1883 as a two-story, red-brick structure. The address was a prime location in the heart of Jackson Ward, the center of Richmond's black business and social life at the turn of the century. The Walker, purchased the house in 1904 and soon began to make changes. They added electricity, a furnace and radiators, they enclosed porches and increased the size of the house to 22 rooms. In 1928 an elevator was added between the rear of the main house and the brick carriage house to provide Mrs. Walker with access

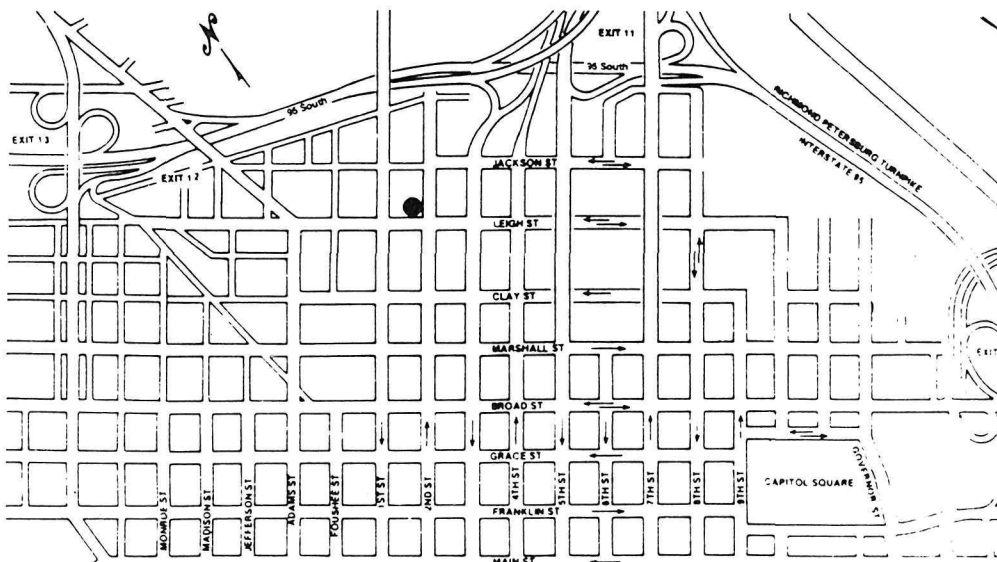
to the second floor. The Walker family continued to own the house until 1979, when it was purchased by the National Park Service.

The historical furnishings throughout the house are identified with Maggie L. Walker. They are valuable to an understanding of the 1904-1934 period of her occupancy. Together the house and furnishings help us to learn more about Maggie L. Walker and the world in which she lived.

**ABOUT YOUR VISIT**

Public transportation is available to the front of the house. Public parking is located two blocks away at Fourth and Leigh Streets or on neighboring streets. Restoration of the site is still in progress. Use caution near the unrestored buildings and on narrow staircases within the house. Please observe all safety regulations. Don't let an accident spoil your visit.

For further information write Superintendent  
Maggie L. Walker N.H.S.  
3215 East Broad St.  
Richmond, VA 23223  
or call: (804) 780-1380



MAGGIE L. WALKER HOUSE IN DOWNTOWN RICHMOND