

THE MAGGIE L. WALKER HOUSE



110½ East Leigh Street
Richmond, Virginia

Located at 110½ East Leigh Street in the Jackson Ward Historic section of Richmond, Virginia, this impressive two-story, red brick structure and its contents reflect the personality and culture of Mrs. Maggie L. Walker. The house is of Victorian-Italianate style, with a Colonial Revival porch added during the Walker period.

The house is located in a 19th century residential neighborhood of mainly row homes, with some singles. This section of Virginia was once the center of Black social and business life. Many prominent Black Americans, such as W.E.B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington and Mary McLeod Bethune, were house guests of Mrs. Walker.

A recent study describes the house as follows: Exterior walls are of dark red painted brick. The roof, at the front of the residence, is modified mansard, with the remainder of the roof, flat with a slight slope for drainage. Slate covers the mansard portion of the roof and heavy gauge tin covers the remainder. Gutters and downspouts are galvanized. Double-hung windows occur throughout except in the sun porch structure. The foundation of the house is brick over



The Library



The Music Room

poured concrete. Interior floors are hardwood downstairs and solid pine upstairs. The house is estimated to have been constructed in the early 1880's. There is limited landscaping to the property which covers the entire 33' x 136' lot with the exception of the 3-foot wide side alley. The alley is located on the east side of the residence and leads from the street to the carriage house.

The first floor of the house contains a living room, music room, a library which houses a collection of rare books and personal papers, a sitting room, dining room, kitchen, playroom and laundry room. To the rear of the house is a brick carriage house. Between the carriage house and the main residence is a two-landing elevator which provided access to both levels of the house during Mrs. Walker's confinement.

On the second floor is an enclosed porch, added to the



The Dining Room



Two artifacts found in the Maggie L. Walker House.

house by Maggie Walker during the time of her infirmity. From this enclosure, which extends about three feet further out than other houses on the block, she was able to observe neighborhood activities. There are eight bedrooms and two bathrooms.

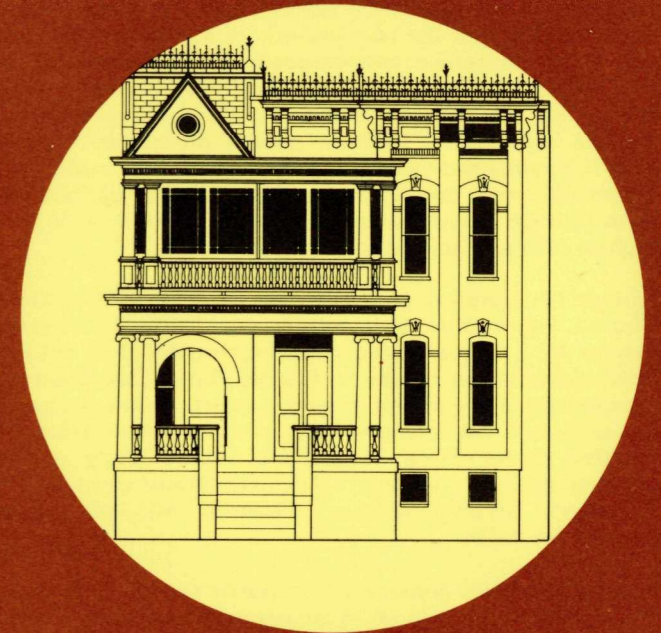
The rooms contain original items from the Walker period, such as furniture, decorations, mementos, family photos, correspondence, receipts, bills, etc. This collection will be used in the restoration of the house to its 1927 appearance. Although certain items are known to be missing, the historical identity of the furnishings, and the quality and number of items have been amazingly preserved in place. These furnishings will assist visitors in understanding the Maggie L. Walker era.

Public bus service is available to the front of the house. Private parking is located two blocks away at the Coliseum exit of Interstate 95.

Administration

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
1980



MAGGIE L. WALKER
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Jackson Ward
National Historic Landmark District
Richmond, Virginia

MAGGIE LENA WALKER

The life and career of Maggie Lena Walker have inspired many. She is distinguished as being the first woman president of an American bank; editor of a newspaper considered one of the best journals of its class in America; and as an impressive and courageous community leader. Her efforts are characterized by the fostering of racial cohesiveness, the creation of jobs for disadvantaged Blacks, and the improvement of life in general for members of her race in Virginia and throughout the country. She made these accomplishments despite tremendous personal and business odds through persistent toil and sacrifice she arose to life's highest calling — service to one's fellow man.

Maggie Lena Walker was born July 15, 1867 in Richmond, Virginia. Her mother, Elizabeth, married William Mitchell, a servant in a palatial home in Richmond. Mitchell became head waiter at the nearby St. Charles Hotel. This prosperity enabled the family to rent its own quarters, a small clapboard house located in a downtown alley between Broad Street and Marshall Street. Here Maggie was reared along with a younger brother, "Johnnie". After witnessing many of her daughter's accomplishments, Elizabeth Mitchell passed away in the 1930's.

Maggie Mitchell's immersion into public service began with her joining, at the age of 14, an organization called the Independent Order of St. Luke. This association, basically an insurance society, was created in 1867 in Baltimore, Maryland, for the purpose of helping the sick and burying the dead during the post-Civil War period. In addition to this benevolent goal, the organization encouraged self-help and racial solidarity.

She progressed rapidly through the ranks of the Independent Order of Saint Luke — from secretary of Good Idea Council No. 16, to appointment as a delegate to annual conventions, to Grand Sentinel, on to higher elected offices such as Right Worthy Grand Chief and National Deputy. As Executive Secretary, she established councils in Virginia and West Virginia.

Educated in Richmond Public and Normal Schools, Maggie continued her studies at Virginia Union University receiving an Honorary Master of Science Degree in 1925. She was a trustee of Virginia Union University in 1931, and was the director of a training school in the District of Columbia and an industrial school in Virginia. She served as President of the Council of Colored Women, Inc.; as the vice-president of the Negro Organization Society of Virginia; on the Executive Board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; and with other fraternal organizations.



Maggie Lena Walker
July 15, 1867 — December 15, 1934

She was a school teacher from 1883 until 1886, when she married Armstead Walker, the son of a prominent building contractor.

Richmond life was very socially oriented. Former slaves, with newly-found economic opportunities and financing from former owners, now classed themselves above those who were not so fortunate. Members of numerous exclusive social clubs heartily disapproved of any "intruders" who might attempt to join their numbers. Despite the fact she married well and could have delighted in the carefree existence of a socialite, Maggie's background of labor and sacrifice more readily lent itself to a life involving more of the same. She continued her interest in and association with the Independent Order of St. Luke and became one of its strongest supporters.

Just before 1890, in honor of her steadfastness, Magdalene Council No. 125 was named for her. She went on to develop a proposal and governing rules for the formation of a Juvenile Branch of the Independent Order of St. Luke.

She was elected secretary of the Endowment Department in 1897.

In 1899 the Order suffered a serious decline in membership, cash availability and indebtedness. The Grand Secretary, W. M. T. Forrester, refused to serve any longer because of a salary dispute and the floundering condition of the Order. Maggie Walker accepted the position of Grand Secretary (or Executive Secretary) at a salary lower than that of Forrester's, and successfully revitalized the work of the Order. The membership increased from 1,000 to 20,000 within seven years. After 25 years Mrs. Walker was commended for her accomplishments: active councils increased from a total of 57 to 1,500; members from 3,400 to approximately 100,000; assets from \$31.66 to nearly \$400,000; and the construction of a new four-story brick office building at 900 St. James St. in Richmond, replacing the old one. Also, the business of St. Luke provided employment to 50 men and women.



A Family Portrait

Maggie L. Walker is flanked by her two sons, Russel E.T. Walker, left, and Melvin D. Walker. Seated on either side of her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Mitchell, are grandchildren of Mrs. Walker: Maggie Laura Walker Lewis (now a practicing physician in Chicago, Ill.) and Armstead Walker. (Circa 1930.)

The Order had varied business interests — a real estate association, a retail store, a printing plant, a bank and a newspaper. The St. Luke Herald, of which Maggie Walker was editor, was begun in 1901 to satisfy the need for closer communication between members of the Order and with the public.

In 1903 Mrs. Walker, under the Order, directed the establishment of the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank, and served as its president until 1931. The name of the bank was changed to the Saint Luke Bank and Trust Company, after the Virginia Banking Division forced the separation of secret orders and their banks. It became one of the best managed and fastest growing financial institutions in the world. The Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, a continuation of the Saint Luke Bank and Trust Company, was formed in 1931. The new, modern construction today stands directly across the street (on opposite corners) from the old Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, at First and Clay Streets in Richmond.

In 1907 Maggie accidentally broke a knee cap, forcing her to curtail many of her activities and to decelerate others. The condition worsened and became complicated, leaving her confined to a wheel chair the remainder of her life. Her home was remodeled to accommodate her impairment.

Accolades and gratuities were bestowed upon Maggie Walker as expressions of the high esteem in which she was held at the 60th Annual Convention of the Independent Order of Saint Luke on August 16-17, 1927. Mrs. Walker was granted a year's leave of absence because of her physical condition. However, she returned to continue as Executive Secretary of the Order until her demise on December 15, 1934.