

Maggie L. Walker

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



Maggie Mitchell, 16, graduated from Richmond Normal School on June 15, 1883. An outstanding student, she studied literature, sciences, and rhetoric.



Mrs. Walker, at about 60 (above), often wore a cross as a symbol of her faith. The portrait (right) was taken in her 30s.

As the Right Worthy Grand Secretary-Treasurer of the Independent Order of St. Luke from 1899 to 1934, Mrs. Walker was the only person entitled to wear this ceremonial sash.

Her weekly newspaper covered the Order's news and promoted black activism. The 1920 diary entry is: "At Tuskegee, Birthday telegram from Office Force."



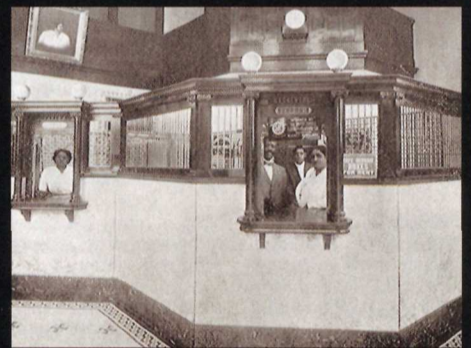
One dollar deposited in the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank when it opened in 1903—if it earned 5% interest, and was compounded daily—would grow to \$148 by 2003. In 1903 a dollar bought a pair of leather sports shoes; today's dollar would not buy the laces.

Turning nickels into dollars

In 1901 Maggie Lena Walker boldly presented her community with an idea for economic empowerment: "We need a savings bank, chartered, officered, and run by the men and women of this Order.... Let us have a bank that will take the nickels and turn them into dollars." In 1903 St. Luke Penny Savings Bank opened its doors—the first chartered bank in the United States founded by a black woman. Today it thrives as the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, the oldest continually operated African American bank in the United States.



The St. Luke Penny Savings Bank moved to First and Marshall in 1911. The new building, designed by black architect Charles T. Russell, featured multi-colored bricks, carved stonework, and arched windows. It no longer stands.



Maggie L. Walker—the first woman founder and president of a chartered bank in the United States—poses with her staff in the teller's window (right). The tiled lobby had finely detailed woodwork and a balcony.

Maggie Mitchell was 14 when she joined the local Independent Order of St. Luke. Founded in 1867, this benevolent society aided African Americans in times of illness, old age, and death. In 1899 she was elected Right Worthy Grand Secretary of the national Independent Order of St. Luke and transformed the struggling order into a successful financial organization with her sound fiscal policies and genius for public relations.

All her life Maggie L. Walker spoke out for equal rights and fair employment, especially for women. She worked alongside Mary McLeod Bethune and W.E.B. Du Bois and served on the boards of local and national civic organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Despite humble beginnings and personal tragedies, Mrs. Walker achieved national prominence and respect for her business and humanitarian accomplishments.



Mrs. Walker's granddaughter, Maggie Laura, enjoyed this "Tu-In-One" doll.

1867-1869
Born July 15, 1867, in Richmond, Va., to Elizabeth Draper, a former slave and servant in Elizabeth Van Lew's home, and Eccles Cuthbert, a white abolitionist writer; Draper marries William Mitchell, Miss Van Lew's butler.

1876-1878
Helps mother by collecting and delivering laundry to white customers and observes disparate economic opportunities for blacks and whites; attends school; is baptized in First African Baptist Church; stepfather Mitchell dies.

1881-1883
Joins Independent Order of St. Luke (I. O. of St. Luke); protests inequality of white and black graduation ceremonies by organizing black student school strike, the first such response in the U.S. to unequal treatment; teaches elementary school; studies accounting at night.

1886-1888
Marries Armstead Walker Jr, a brick contractor; quits teaching; continues activities with I. O. of St. Luke.

1890-1894
Son Russell Eccles Talmage born 1890; son Armstead Mitchell born 1893 (dies at seven months).

1895-1897
Establishes juvenile branch of I. O. of St. Luke; becomes Grand Deputy Matron of the branch; son Melvin DeWitt born 1897.

1899
Elected Right Worthy Grand Secretary of St. Luke, its highest rank, (later becomes Secretary-Treasurer) retains position until 1934.

1901-1905
Establishes newspaper, St. Luke Herald, 1902; charts St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, 1903, is president until 1931; moves to 110 1/2 East Leigh Street; establishes the St. Luke Emporium, a retail store.

1915
Husband Armstead accidentally killed.

1921
Runs unsuccessfully with John Mitchell on "Lily Black" ticket; he for Virginia's governor, she for superintendent of public instruction.

1923-1927
Receives honorary Masters degree from Virginia Union University; son Russell dies.

1928
Confined to wheelchair by paralysis.

1934
Dies in Richmond on December 15 of diabetic gangrene; is buried at Evergreen Cemetery.

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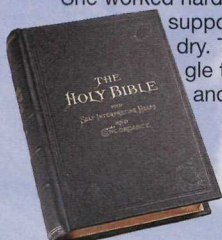
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Maggie L. Walker was already famous as a dynamic leader in Richmond's black community when she and her family moved to 110 1/2 East Leigh Street in 1904. She had devoted more than 20 years to the Independent Order of St. Luke and had founded a newspaper and chartered a bank. But to Walker, community service and professional success were only part of what constituted a full life. She knew that success sprang not only from thriftiness and hard work, but also from a commitment to her God and her family.

Maggie Mitchell joined the First African Baptist church at age 11, and she was inspired by the members who prayed and worked together to uplift their community. Throughout her life she studied the Bible (below), participated in church activities, and quoted scripture in her writings and speeches.

Her stepfather died when she was nine years old, thrusting the family further into poverty. She worked hard helping her mother, who supported them by taking in laundry. The poverty and daily struggle taught her self-sufficiency and how to deal with tragedy.

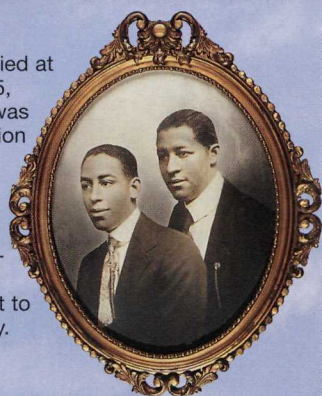


Despite the hardship, Maggie Mitchell graduated from Richmond Colored Normal School at 16 and taught elementary school for three years. In 1886 she married Armstead Walker Jr. (below). Retired from teaching (it was illegal at that time for married women to teach), she directed her energies toward strengthening the Independent Order of St. Luke and caring for her growing family. In time, Walker's boundless devotion to her work and family rewarded them with financial and social success.

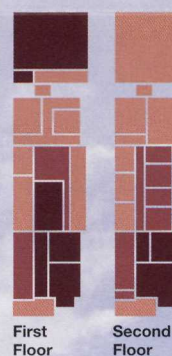
Tragedy struck in 1915 when Armstead was accidentally killed, leaving Mrs. Walker to manage a large household. Her investments and hard work kept the family together. The family expanded again when her sons Russell (portrait, left) and Melvin (portrait, right) married and brought their wives to live at home, which later included four grandchildren. As the family grew, the house grew too—finally to a 28-room complex that all but covered the 33 by 139 foot lot. In 1928 paralysis confined Mrs. Walker to a wheelchair. Undaunted, she added an elevator to the house and altered her car and desks to accommodate the wheelchair.

Maggie Lena Walker died at home on December 15, 1934. Nationally, she was acclaimed as a champion for oppressed blacks and women.

In Richmond, she was mourned as a community leader who never forgot her commitment to her God and her family.



110 1/2 Leigh Street



1883 The two-story Victorian house with Italianate detailing began with nine rooms.

1890s Robert Jones, a black physician, built rooms and the west wing for a waiting and examination area.

1904-22 Walker converted gas lights to electric, added central heating, a cellar, 12 rooms, and the two-story porch.



Planning Your Visit

Visitor Center

All activities and tours begin at the visitor center at 600 N. 2nd Street. Here you will find information, exhibits, and a short video. A bookstore offers publications and items about Maggie L. Walker and African American culture. The visitor center and house are open Monday through Saturday 9 a.m. to

5 p.m.; they are closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1.

Guided House Tours

The only way to see the house is with a guide; there is no fee. Tours leave the visitor center every half hour; the last tour of the house begins at 4:30 p.m. A limited number of persons is allowed on each tour,

and there may be a waiting period. You may see the film, the courtyard, and other buildings until your tour begins. Group tours require advance reservations; call ahead.

Special Programs

The park offers activities all year. A highlight is the annual birthday celebration for Maggie L. Walker on or about July 15.

Accessibility

The visitor center, courtyard, restrooms, and first floor of the house are accessible for visitors with disabilities.

Safety

Use caution when touring the grounds and the house. The stairs are steep and narrow—please watch your step. Smoking is not allowed.

All historic and natural features are protected by federal law.

Administration

The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site was designated in 1978 as part of the National Park Service. It honors Maggie L. Walker's leadership in business that fostered opportunity for blacks and for women.

More Information

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
3215 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23223
804-771-2017
www.nps.gov/mawa

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Getting Here

From I-95 north/I-64 west: take exit 76A (Chamberlayne Parkway); turn left at the light onto Chamberlayne; turn left onto West Leigh St.; go 2 1/2 blocks to the park at 110 1/2 East Leigh Street. From south I-95/east I-64: take exit 76B (Belvidere); turn left at the stop sign onto Leigh Street and go 7 1/2 blocks to the park.

Limited vehicle and bus parking is available on Second Street.



Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Richmond, Virginia

Visiting Historic Jackson Ward

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Richmond's Jackson Ward was one of the most prosperous black communities in the United States. Here, blacks owned and operated banks, insurance companies, retail stores, theaters, and commercial and social institutions. Known as the birthplace of African American entrepreneurship, today this area is one of the nation's largest National Historic Landmark Districts associated with black history and culture.

You can enjoy a walking or driving tour of Jackson Ward that highlights important sites, including the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, 110 1/2 E. Leigh Street; Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia, 00 Clay Street; and the Bojangles monument, at the intersection of Chamberlayne, Leigh, and Adams. For visitor information call 800-444-2777.