

Maggie L. Walker

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



Maggie Lena Walker

"Eternal vigilance is the price of success." — Maggie L. Walker, 1901

Maggie Lena Walker was an unusually gifted woman, whose life and career have inspired many. Her distinguished public service was characterized by persistent toil and sacrifice. Despite tremendous personal and business adversities, her courageous leadership fostered racial cohesiveness and improved economic conditions for her people.

FAMILY LIFE

Maggie L. Walker was born July 15, 1867 in Richmond, Virginia, to Elizabeth Draper, a servant in the home of Elizabeth Van Lew. In 1868, her mother married William Mitchell, a butler in the same household. The family rented a small clapboard house in a downtown alley between Broad and Marshall Streets. Here, Maggie and a younger brother, "Johnnie", were raised.

Maggie was educated in Richmond public and normal schools. From adolescence she was marked for some form of public service, displaying leadership, character, quickness of mind, and a keen business sense. Thus, she taught school for three years after graduation from high school.

In 1886 Maggie married Armstead Walker, Jr. This ended her teaching career but was a new beginning, as she now became housewife and mother. The Walkers had two sons — Russel Ecles Talmadge and Melvin Dewitt.

Armstead died in 1915 leaving Maggie to manage a very large house and family. A major addition to the house in 1922 enabled her to provide a home for her two sons, their wives and children, her mother, and her companion and housekeeper. A debilitating leg and knee injury in 1928 confined her to a wheel chair until her death of diabetic gangrene December 15, 1934.

ACHIEVEMENTS

When she was but 14 years of age, Maggie joined the local Independent Order of St. Luke. This was a fraternal insurance society established in 1867 in Baltimore, Maryland. Its purpose was to minister to the sick and aged, promote humanitarian causes, and encourage individual self-help and personal integrity.



A Family Portrait

Maggie L. Walker is flanked by her two sons, Russel E.T. Walker 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 1920)

She served in numerous capacities of increasing responsibility from that of a delegate to an annual convention, to her designation in 1897 as a member of the Order's Committee of Grand Chiefs. At this time, she improved the Order's endowment system. Later, as secretary of the committee for the Order's constitution and laws, she developed regulations governing the national organization of the Order. Their objective was to increase the intellectual, moral, and financial development of the Order's members.

Her contributions to the Order were many. From the position of Grand Secretary, which she accepted in 1899, the membership and

numbers of councils were significantly increased, finances of the Order were made solvent, and employment provided for 50 men and women, reversing a deteriorating condition of the past several years.

The St. Luke Herald 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. Mrs. Walker served as its first president until 1931, though by that time the bank had been merged with two others to form the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company, as it is known today. It is located in a new building across the street from the original bank at First and Marshall Streets. In 1905 the St. Luke Emporium, a retail store, was opened by the Order.

In addition to the numerous commitments she undertook in behalf of St. Luke, Maggie L. Walker was an advocate of Black women's rights and served on the boards of trustees for several women's groups. She helped organize and served as vice-president of the Richmond chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

THE MAGGIE L. WALKER HOUSE

This two-story, red brick house was purchased by Maggie L. Walker and her husband in 1904. The house is located at 110-½ East Leigh Street in historic Jackson Ward, the center of Richmond's Black business and social life at the turn of the century.

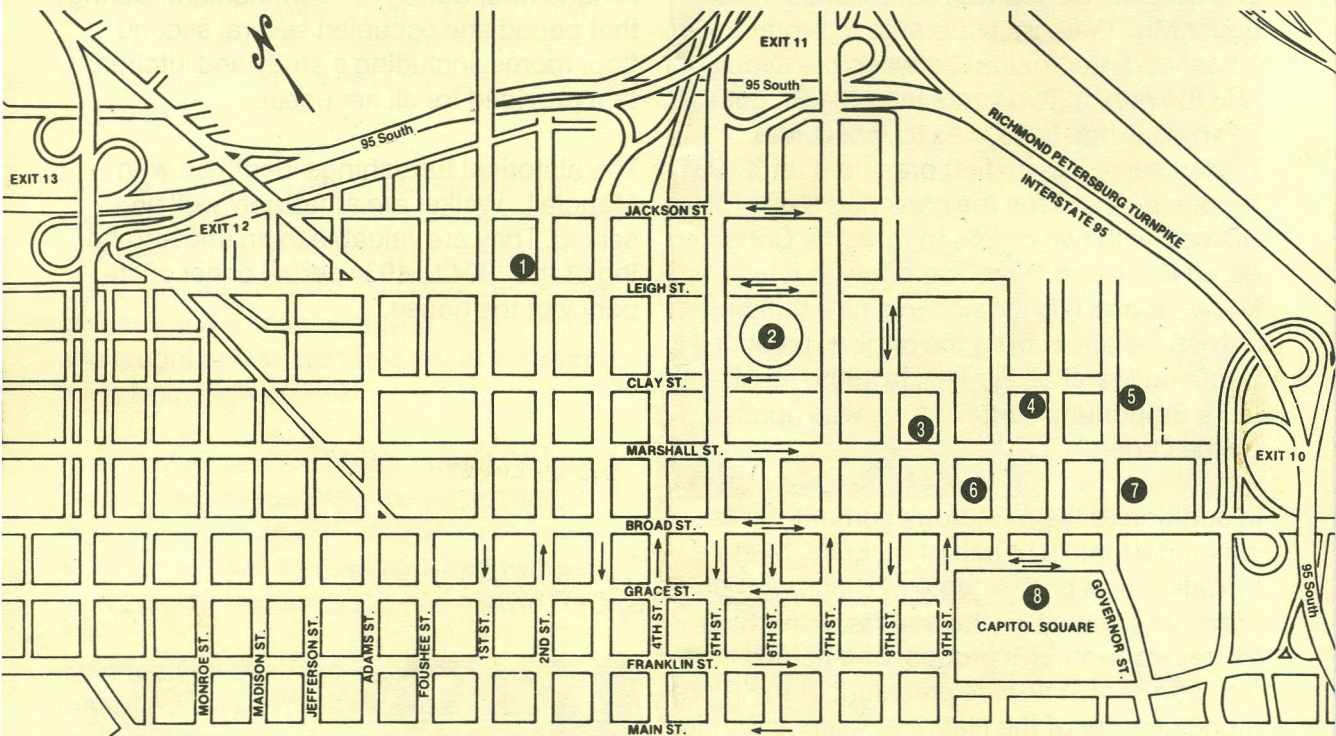
Among the major structural changes to the house was the enclosed sun porch added in her later years of occupancy. It leads from her bedroom and allowed her to observe neighborhood activities on Leigh street during her infirmity.

There are more than 20 rooms in the house, including front and back parlors, sitting and dining rooms, and a playroom. Between the brick carriage house and the rear of the main portion of the house is the elevator, installed in 1928 to provide Mrs. Walker access to the second floor during her confinement. During that period she occupied several second floor rooms, including a study and kitchen, that provided for all her needs.

The historical furnishings identified with Maggie L. Walker are amazingly well preserved. They are valuable to an understanding of the 1904 to 1934 period of her occupancy of the house.



110-½ East Leigh Street
Richmond, Virginia



Downtown Richmond

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| ① Maggie L. Walker NHS | ⑤ Museum of the Confederacy |
| ② Coliseum | ⑥ City Hall |
| ③ John Marshall House | ⑦ Medical College of Virginia |
| ④ Valentine Museum | ⑧ State Capitol |

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.

Restoration of the historic site is still in progress. Use caution on the narrow staircases within the home, and observe all safety regulations. Don't let an accident spoil your visit.

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 3215 E. Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia 23223, is in immediate charge.