

## Biography of Madame C.J. Walker

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Updated January 30, 2018

Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker is better known as Madame CJ Walker or Madame Walker. She and Marjorie Joyner revolutionized the hair care and cosmetics industry for [African-American](#) women early in the 20th century.

### Early Years

Madame CJ Walker was born in poverty-stricken rural Louisiana in 1867. The daughter of former slaves, she was orphaned at the age of 7. Walker and her older sister survived by working in the cotton fields of Delta and Vicksburg in Mississippi. She married at age fourteen and her only daughter was born in 1885.

After her husband's death two years later, she traveled to St. Louis to join her four brothers who had established themselves as barbers. Working as a laundrywoman, she managed to save enough money to educate her daughter and became involved in activities with the National Association of Colored Women.

During the 1890s, Walker began to suffer from a scalp ailment that caused her to lose some of her hair. Embarrassed by her appearance, she experimented with a variety of home-made remedies and products made by another black entrepreneur named Annie Malone. In 1905, Walker became a sales agent for Malone and moved to Denver, where she married Charles Joseph Walker.

### Madame Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower

Walker later changed her name to Madame CJ Walker and founded her own business. She sold her own [hair product](#) called Madame Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower, a scalp conditioning and healing formula. To promote her products, she embarked on an exhausting sales drive throughout the South and Southeast, going door to door, giving demonstrations and working on sales and marketing strategies. In 1908, she opened a college in Pittsburgh to train her "hair culturists."

Eventually, her products formed the basis of a thriving national corporation that at one point employed over 3,000 people. Her expanded product line was called the Walker System, which included a broad offering of cosmetics, licensed Walker Agents and Walker Schools that offered meaningful employment and personal growth to thousands of African-American women. Walker's aggressive marketing strategy combined with her relentless ambition led to her becoming the first known female African-American woman self-made millionaire.

Having amassed a fortune over a period of 15 years, Walker died at the age of 52. Her prescription for success was a combination of perseverance, hard work, faith in herself and in God, honest business dealings and quality products. "There is no royal flower-strewn path to success," she once observed. "And if there is, I have not found it. For if I have accomplished anything in life ,it is because I have been willing to work hard."

## **Improved Permanent Wave Machine**

[Marjorie Joyner](#), an employee of Madame CJ Walker's empire, invented an improved permanent wave machine. This device was patented in 1928 and was designed to curl or perm women's hair for a relatively lengthy period of time. The wave machine turned out to be popular among white and black women and allowed for longer-lasting wavy hair styles. Joyner went on to become a prominent figure in Madame CJ Walker's industry, though she never profited directly from her invention. The invention was the assigned intellectual property of the Walker Company.