

# Madam C.J. Walker: Self-Made Millionaire and Philanthropist

Madam C.J. Walker was born on December 23, 1867 near Delta, Louisiana. Her birth name was Sarah Breedlove. Her parents were slaves on the cotton plantation where she was born. Her parents were emancipated, which means freed, in 1863 after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation freed more than 3 million enslaved people in the Southern states. Sarah was the first member of her family born into freedom.

When Sarah's parents died when she was seven years old, she became an orphan. She moved to Mississippi to live with her older sister. Sarah had to work to earn money even though she was only a child. She did not have the opportunity to go to school. Sarah moved to Missouri when she was in her early twenties. She continued to work hard. But she did not make very much money. She only made \$1.50 per day.

Sarah developed a scalp disorder when she was living in Missouri. It caused her to lose much of her hair. She began to teach herself about different hair care products. She also learned about hair care from her brothers who lived in Missouri. They were barbers.

In the early 1900's, Sarah became a saleswoman for the Poro Company. The Poro Company sold hair care products for African American women. In 1905, Sarah moved to Colorado. She began researching and developing her own hair care products. She started selling her products to her friends. She also started selling them door-to-door.

In 1906, she married Charles Joseph (C.J.) Walker. She changed her name to Madam C.J. Walker. "Madam" was a word used in the French beauty industry.

With her husband, Madam C.J. Walker traveled to many different states to help build their hair care product business. In 1908, they moved to Pennsylvania and opened a beauty school. The beauty school trained women to use the hair care products that Madam C.J. Walker had invented.

In 1910, she moved the headquarters for the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company to Indianapolis, Indiana. She built a factory to make her products. She also built a school to train women to sell her hair care products door-to-door. She trained thousands of saleswomen. Many of the managers in her company were also women. In the 1920s, she expanded her business into other countries like Costa Rica, Panama, and Jamaica.

Madam Walker was a very good businesswoman. She became very wealthy. She built a large home called Villa Lewaro in New York. Vertner Tandy designed the home. He was the first African American registered architect in New York State.

Since she believed in giving back to her community, Madam C.J. Walker was also a generous philanthropist. A philanthropist is a person who gives money to help people and support causes

they believe are important. Madam C.J. Walker funded educational scholarships and supported civil rights organizations. She also gave money to support religious and arts organizations.

Madam C.J. Walker died on May 25, 1919 at the age of 51. Her hair care product business was valued at more than \$1 million at the time of her death. She was one of the first female self-made millionaires in America.

## Questions

1. Which American president issued the Emancipation Proclamation?
2. Why did Madam C.J. Walker invent hair care products?
3. How did Madam C.J. Walker support her community?
4. What is a philanthropist?