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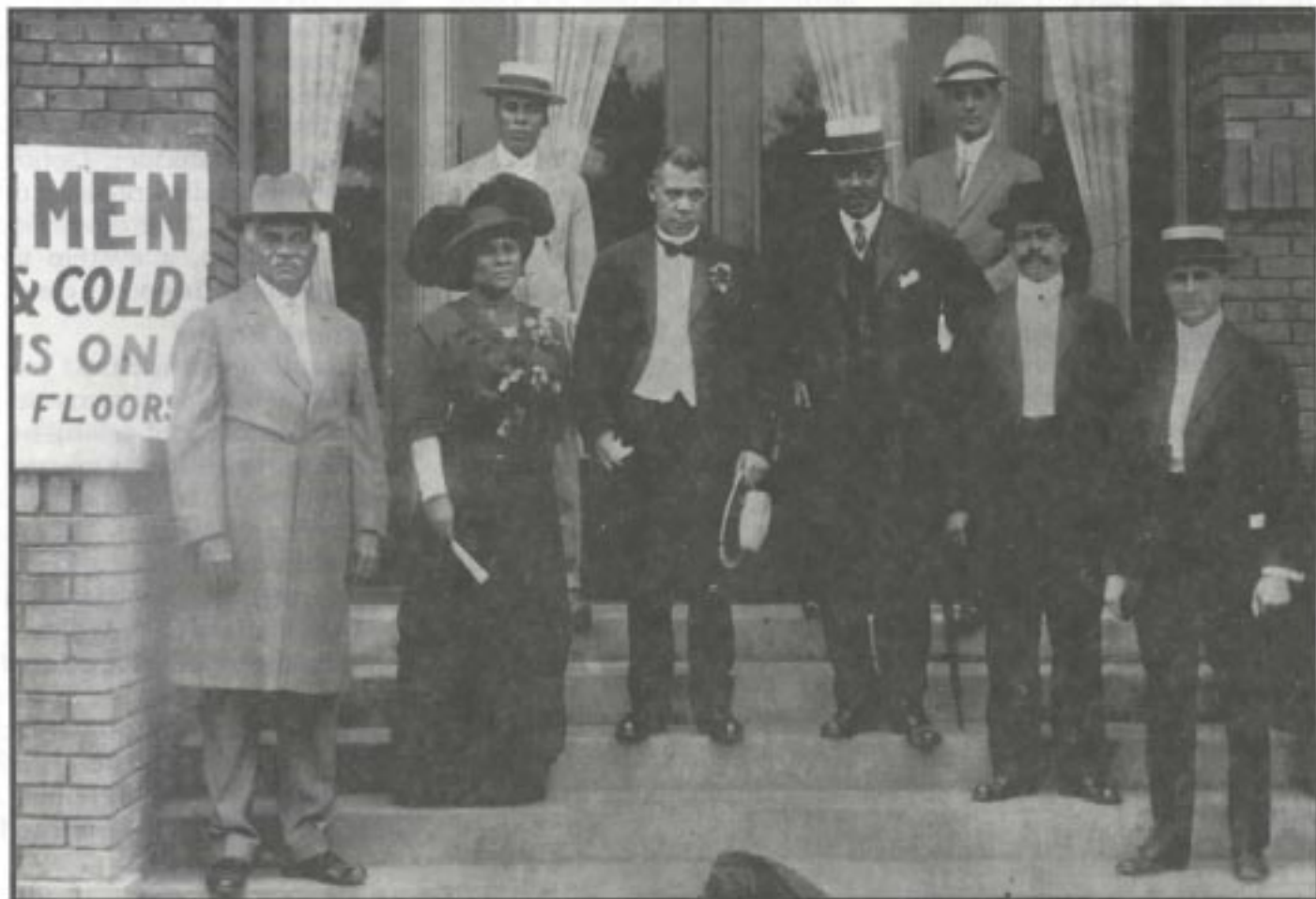


THE INDIANA JUNIOR HISTORIAN

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Focus—Madam C. J. Walker

Madam Walker and Booker T. Washington (to her left, with his hat in his hand) pose with other dignitaries at the Indianapolis Senate Avenue YMCA dedication in 1913.
Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 2137.



Madam C. J. Walker: A Success Story



Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 2140.

Sarah Breedlove was born in 1867 in Delta, Louisiana, two years after the Civil War had ended. Her parents, now sharecroppers, had dreamed of freedom for a very long time, but their joy soon gave way to despair when they realized that freedom for former slaves brought little change to their lives. Laws had been passed giving blacks new rights, but often these laws were not upheld in the courts. The Breedloves always hoped for a better life for their three children, but they both died of yellow fever in 1874 leaving Sarah an orphan at age 7.

She went to Vicksburg, Mississippi to live with her older sister but married at age 14 to escape an unhappy home life. She gave birth to a daughter, Lelia, when she was 17 and was widowed by age 20. By 1887, blacks had made great

I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. I was promoted from there to the washtub. Then I was promoted to the cook kitchen, and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground.

Spoken in 1912, by Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker, better known as Madam C. J. Walker, a black businesswoman.

progress, but life was still very difficult, especially in the south. Sarah realized that her life would not improve if she stayed there.

She moved in 1887 to St. Louis, Missouri, and became a laundress. The next 20 years were filled with backbreaking labor for the miserable sum of \$1.50 a week. Somehow she managed to save enough money to send Lelia to school. Sarah never gave up hope for a better life and was determined to pull herself and her child out of poverty.

Always Look Your Best

Sarah had always believed that no matter how difficult life was, you should always *do* and *look* your best and have pride in yourself. When she began to lose her hair, she was naturally very upset. She tried various hair products, but nothing seemed to work. Then, Sarah learned that her brother had died and her sister-in-law wanted Sarah to come to Denver, Colorado, to live. The move was a turning point in Sarah's life.

Arriving in Denver in 1905 with \$1.50, Sarah got a job as a cook. She was still troubled by hair loss and experimented at night, mixing chemicals on the stove in her small attic apartment. Much to her delight, she discovered a formula that not only made her hair grow but left it thick and soft. Neighbors began asking how she got such beautiful hair and asked if they could buy the product. Opportunity was finally knocking on Sarah's door. She developed three products, a system for using them, and a special comb.

Business Begins

Sarah spent the next year going door to door demonstrating her system and selling her products. In 1906 she married a newspaper man by the name of Charles J. Walker. It was then that Sarah changed her name and the name of her company to Madam C. J. Walker.

Business was so good that she began to recruit black women, who were taught the special hair care system and sent out to sell the products. Many of these women opened

beauty shops in their homes. It was the first time that black women were given a chance to earn a living at a job other than cook, laundress, or maid.

Madam C. J. Walker was a good business woman and soon expanded her business to include mail orders. By 1908 she was making \$400 a month. This salary was unheard of for most white males, and it was incredible that a woman, a black woman at that, was able to make so much money. Convinced she could do even better, she moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where there were more people to buy her products.

The Move to Indianapolis

Madam Walker had her eye on Indianapolis as a good place to build her factory. When she visited in 1910, she was so warmly greeted by the black community and impressed with the many successful black businesses, that she chose to stay, making Indianapolis her national headquarters. Her factory employed only local black men and women.

Madam Walker outside her home in Indianapolis, c.1915.

Her factory was located behind her home.

Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, A 69.

Business Booms

By 1912, Madam C. J. Walker was divorced, her business employed 1,600 agents, and she was making \$1,000 a week. Putting all of her time and energy into her business, she traveled constantly, promoting her business and telling black audiences how they too could achieve success through determination and hard work. She encouraged individuals to better themselves with education and became a role model for black woman and a spokesperson for her race.

She moved to Harlem, New York, in 1916. By then she was an extremely wealthy woman and gave generously to black schools, organizations, and individuals. She also spoke out on political issues although she was unable to vote. In

1918, she became the first woman millionaire. Madam C. J. Walker died in 1919 at the age of 52, leaving a legacy of love and pride for her race that carries on today.

Source: Bundles, Madam C. J. Walker.

Activities

- If Madam Walker could visit your classroom today, what questions would you ask her?
- Make a poster illustrating events from Madam Walker's life.
- Write ten trivia questions about Madam Walker. Quiz your classmates with your questions.
- You are the editor of a book about famous people. Write an entry for Madam Walker or any other famous African-American.



The Harlem Renaissance

Renaissance means rebirth. That is exactly what happened to black creativity during the early decades of the 1900s. This was the time of the New Negro Movement, with political, social, and cultural impact. Black organizations were formed, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The center of all of this activity and change was an area of Manhattan, New York, called Harlem. During the period between 1919 and 1929 Harlem became a mecca for black painters, poets, musicians, and writers. At night the streets were alive with both blacks and whites, as they made their way to the many clubs to hear the biggest names in jazz, a new and distinctly black form of music. Lavish parties were held where these talented men and women met with New York's wealthiest and most influential people, who gave money and arranged showings and readings of their work.

The stock market crash of 1929 brought the Harlem Renaissance to an abrupt end. Many creative blacks, now without financial support,

found themselves, with the exception of a few, descending into obscurity. The Harlem Renaissance was over, but its legacy is a point of pride for all Americans.

Source: David Driskell, et al., Harlem Renaissance.

A'Lelia

A'Lelia¹ Walker Robinson, the only child of Madam C. J. Walker, was 34 when she inherited her mother's company along with a vast fortune. The year was 1919. Six years before, she had moved to Harlem, New York. This area was fast becoming the center of political and artistic growth for black Americans.

The year A'Lelia came into her money, Harlem began what was to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Anyone who was anyone, gathered there for fabulous parties where they could rub elbows with black poets, painters, and writers. Clubs were jumping, the jazz was hot, and in the middle of it all was A'Lelia Robinson.

A'Lelia used her great wealth to promote and present these talented black artists to the high society of New York. Her parties were events. She even turned her apartment into The Dark Tower, a club where the rich and famous gathered.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, A'Lelia's company was hit hard. Her extravagant lifestyle had begun to take its toll, both on her fortune and her person. Her extraordinary life ended in 1931 when she was only 46.

¹Lelia Walker changed her name to A'Lelia.

Sources: Lasseter, Margaret, "From log cabin to riverside mansion," *Gannett Westchester Newspapers*, August 20, 1969; *Bundles*, Madam C. J. Walker; David Driskell, et al., Harlem Renaissance.



A'Leita Walker Robinson.
 Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Walker Collection, C 3712.

Madam Walker's Road to Riches

- To get the word list for the word search puzzle at the bottom of the page, unscramble each group of letters below.
- Each group represents a city and state where Madam C. J. Walker lived.
- After you unscramble the places, circle the **cities** in the word search puzzle at the bottom of the page.

Aldet, Nsuioalaai

Gcrbivuks, Imspitsssip

Ts Ulsio, Oimsusir

Vender, Dolorcoa

Butgrthips, Ynalepsnainv

Slpninitoaaad, Aadinin

Mlaerh, Ewn, Kyro

D J Q V Q G W V I C K S B U R G J Q L V E L
 F S I G S Q A Q Z H N M N V E S T L O U I S
 R J D E L T A R S H A R L E M T U G X G A O
 W S I L O P A N A I D N I E D O M E J K E U
 W F N C A K N Y R M M P I T T S B U R G H B
 O R M V G A N E R E V N E D O L T B D S X Q
 Z L S B D G Y K K V R V W D S E I P F N C Y
 Y S Z P X R B N V G M W V P P V U E V C Y S

Answers: Delta, Louisiana; Michigan; Mississippi; St. Louis, Missouri; Denver, Colorado; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Indianapolis, Indiana; Hartford, New York

Blacks and Indiana History: An Overview

Sometimes history books do not tell the story of all the people living in a region or a state. This is so for the story of African-Americans in Indiana. Just as white American settlers moved into the new state of Indiana, so too did free black settlers because the 1816 Constitution prohibited slavery.¹ Most settlers—whatever their ethnic background—wanted to own land and be independent. Often, black settlers bought land for farms near Quaker communities which welcomed them. Sometimes they settled in Indiana towns along the Ohio River where work was plentiful.

However, the black pioneers in Indiana did not enjoy the same civil rights as their white neighbors. In spite of efforts by Quakers and others opposed to slavery, Indiana law—like laws in its neighbor states—prohibited free black men from voting, serving in the militia, and educating their children in public schools. Many white settlers and officials encouraged blacks to leave the state and colonize Liberia in Africa.

African-Americans continued to move into the state of Indiana until 1851. At that time, the new Indiana Constitution prohibited blacks from moving into the state. Laws passed to enforce the 1851 Constitution made life very difficult for blacks already in Indiana. As tensions between the North and South brought the Civil War to reality in 1861, conditions for free black residents of Indiana became hazardous. Many free blacks and escaping slaves moved to Canada where slavery had been abolished in the 1830s.

After the Civil War, many blacks left the South looking for jobs and a better way of life for themselves and their families. Indiana was one of their destinations. Most black families were not able to buy land for farms, but sought jobs in the cities and towns.

Federal and state laws were passed to provide access to schools, public accommodations, and transportation. In 1870 black men were given the right to vote. Many people ignored these laws, however, and prejudice and politics continued to make life very difficult for black Americans in Indiana and elsewhere.

During this same period, African-Americans created their own strong communities within Indiana's cities and towns. Usually separated from white businesses and residences, blacks built their own churches and schools, developed businesses, published newspapers, and organized into numerous clubs to improve themselves and to aid their neighbors. In 1910, Madam C. J. Walker moved into just such a community in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Although the numbers of blacks in Indiana may not seem very significant, population figures in 1850 show Indiana second only to Ohio in the percentage of black residents in the Northwest Territory states. Available figures from the U.S. Census of Population demonstrate the growth from 1850 to 1920 as Indiana became an industrialized state.

Date	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Total Population
1850	11,296	1.14
1860	11,428	0.84
1870	24,560	1.46
1880	39,228	1.98
1890	45,215	2.06
1900	57,505	2.28
1910	60,320	2.23
1920	80,810	2.76

¹Indentured servants and slaves can be documented in early Indiana in violation of this prohibition.

Sources: *Thornbrough, The Negro in Indiana*; *Thornbrough, Indiana in the Civil War Era*; *Phillips, Indiana in Transition*.

Blacks and Indiana History Timeline

1746		1746	Five black slaves belonging to French settlers in Vincennes are first documented African-Americans living in what is now Indiana.
1787	1787	U.S. Congress passes Northwest Ordinance prohibiting slavery in the Northwest Territory; Territorial Governor St. Clair interprets Article VI to prevent further introduction of slaves and does not free those slaves already present.	
1805	Indiana Territorial Legislature enacts a measure which allows white settlers to bring blacks into Indiana and indenture them into service.		
1816		1816	First Indiana Constitution prohibits slavery.
1820	1820	In a test case, <i>Polly v. Lasselle</i> , the Indiana Supreme Court abolishes slavery in Indiana, but illegal indentures still existed.	
1831	Indiana General Assembly enacts a law requiring all blacks in Indiana to post a bond of \$500 as a guarantee against becoming public charges.		
1832		1832	Lost Creek, in Vigo County, is site of large land purchases by free blacks from North Carolina.
1843	1843	Indiana General Assembly restricts public schools, previously open to all, to white children only.	
1850	U.S. Congress passes Fugitive Slave Act which denies jury trial to alleged fugitives and compels northerners to help enforce the return of blacks to the South.		
1851		1851	Article XIII of the 1851 Indiana Constitution prohibits free blacks from immigrating into Indiana, and provides money to send current black residents to colonize in Liberia in Africa.
1863	Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves in seceded states; the 28th Indiana Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops organizes to fight for the North.		
1866	1866	Indiana Supreme Court invalidates Article XIII of the 1851 Constitution.	
1869		1869	In special session, the Indiana General Assembly passes an act requiring school trustees to organize separate schools for black children where sufficient black population exists.
1870	1870	States ratify 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving the right to vote to black men.	
1875	U.S. Congress passes Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations, amusements, and conveyances.		
1877		1877	Indiana General Assembly amends school law permitting black students to attend white schools where no black schools exist, thereby opening public high schools to blacks.
1883	1883	U.S. Supreme Court declares portions of Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional.	
1885	Indiana General Assembly passes Civil Rights Law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations, amusements, and conveyances, but the law is generally ignored by many white residents.		
1896		1896	In <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> , the U.S. Supreme Court declares that "separate but equal" facilities do not violate the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.
1902	1902	Young black men in Indianapolis form group which is admitted as a branch of Indiana Young Men's Christian Association which becomes the Senate Avenue YMCA.	
1915	Indiana Branch of NAACP, with membership of 200, is 10th largest in country; other branches are in Terre Haute, Evansville, Gary, Vincennes.		

The Walker Legacy

Madam Walker had never been a person who would accept injustice quietly. When she attempted to attend a movie at a downtown Indianapolis theater, she was told that the price was higher for colored people. She refused to pay more than white people attending the same movie. She sued the company that operated the movie theater and then decided to build her own movie theater. She died before she could reach that goal.

The Madam C. J. Walker building was built in 1927, eight years after her death, and served as a center for the black community of Indianapolis. Social, cultural, and educational events took place at the Walker

building. The four story building included a theater, a casino, a beauty shop, a drug store, and a restaurant. There were also offices for black doctors, lawyers, and other professional businessmen who had difficulty locating office space in white owned buildings. The

to those who toil; to those who think; to those who strive readily; to those who love good music, good pictures, high class entertainment . . . to all classes; to all races. Freeman B. Ransom, attorney and general manager of the Walker Manufacturing Company, building dedication.

Walker Manufacturing Company was also headquartered in the building.

The Walker building offered black people a place of their own for films, jazz, and vaudeville during the years be-

fore the great depression. There were not many places where black people were allowed to go for entertainment, and the Walker building on Indiana Avenue was one of the few places available for blacks in segregated¹ Indianapolis. For fifty years the Walker building

featured music, dance interpretation, comedy, and dramatic readings. The Walker Theatre was one of the first establishments to highlight jazz. The jazz clubs on Indiana Avenue have become legendary, and now there is a revival of music and performances at the Walker Theatre.

Today the building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and features African, Egyptian, and Moorish² designs. This style of architecture was very popular during the 1920s, and movie theaters often used Egyptian designs. The Walker building is so interesting because it combines three different styles.

The building is *flatiron* shaped; in other words, it has the triangular shape of an iron. Many buildings in large cities have this shape because the diagonal streets cut the property lots into triangular shapes, and a triangular building fits better on a triangular lot.



The Walker Building, c. 1950. Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, Bass Photo Collection.

The major doorways of the building have molded African designs and masks in bright colors. These designs are made of terra cotta, a clay that is fired or baked. In order to make these designs, an artist made a soft clay model. Then a mold was made of gelatin³ (a substance firmer than Jell-O). Local clay was then poured into the gelatin mold, and the hardware needed to fasten the designs to the wall was placed in the clay. Next the pieces were placed in a special oven to bake. These fired pieces were sometimes glazed with a clear or colored solution, and then attached to the building.

African and Egyptian designs were used inside the building, too. These designs were made using the same basic process described previously except plaster was used instead of local clay. The plaster had to dry but was not fired. The plaster could then be painted and attached to an inside wall or ceiling.

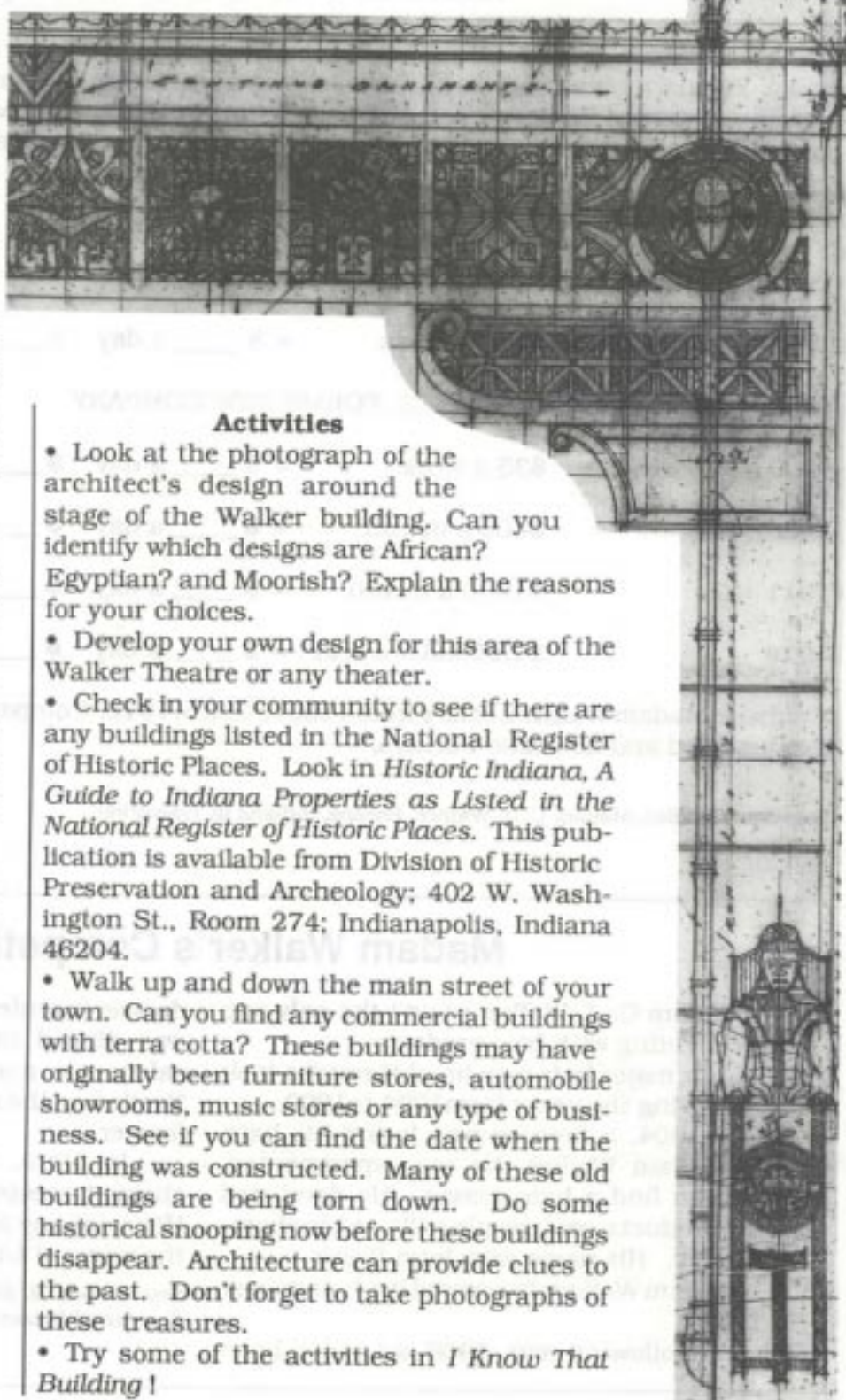
The Walker building was restored in the late 1980s. The Walker Manufacturing Company is no longer located there. The Walker Theatre still presents entertainment for everyone, regardless of skin color.

¹Segregated means to separate a race or a class from the group. The opposite of segregate is integrate.

²Moorish designs are geometrical and balanced. The Moors were people of Arab decent living in Northern Africa.

³Today, a liquid latex is used to make the mold.

Original Walker Theatre architectural drawings.
Courtesy: Indiana Historical Society, C 4091.



Activities

- Look at the photograph of the architect's design around the stage of the Walker building. Can you identify which designs are African? Egyptian? and Moorish? Explain the reasons for your choices.
- Develop your own design for this area of the Walker Theatre or any theater.
- Check in your community to see if there are any buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Look in *Historic Indiana, A Guide to Indiana Properties as Listed in the National Register of Historic Places*. This publication is available from Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology; 402 W. Washington St., Room 274; Indianapolis, Indiana 46204.
- Walk up and down the main street of your town. Can you find any commercial buildings with terra cotta? These buildings may have originally been furniture stores, automobile showrooms, music stores or any type of business. See if you can find the date when the building was constructed. Many of these old buildings are being torn down. Do some historical snooping now before these buildings disappear. Architecture can provide clues to the past. Don't forget to take photographs of these treasures.
- Try some of the activities in *I Know That Building!*

Activity

Madam's Bookkeeper

You are Madam C. J. Walker's accountant and are responsible for keeping her financial records in order. Fill in the blanks below. Use the hours per day (10) and days per week (6) that follow to arrive at your answers. The income listed below is accurate. We don't know how much time Madam Walker spent working to improve her life. During this time period, however, most people worked 10 hours per day, 6 days per week. Wages for unskilled male workers were \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day; women doing domestic work averaged \$2.64 per week.

Year	Occupation	Salary				
1890	Laundress	\$1.50 a week	= \$ ____ a day	\$ ____ a month	\$ ____ a year	
1905	INVENTS HAIR PRODUCT, FORMS NEW COMPANY					
1906		\$35 a week	= \$ ____ a day	\$ ____ a month	\$ ____ a year	
1908		\$400 a month	= \$ ____ a day	\$ ____ a week	\$ ____ a year	
1911		\$1000 a month	= \$ ____ a day	\$ ____ a week	\$ ____ a year	
1918		\$1,000,000 a year	= \$ ____ a day	\$ ____ a week	\$ ____ a month	

Compare Madam Walker's salary from 1890 to that of 1918. Compare her wages to the average wages for unskilled and domestic workers.

Sources: *Bundles*, Madam C. J. Walker; *Phillips*, *Indiana in Transition*.

Madam Walker's Competition

Madam C. J. Walker wasn't the only one experimenting with hair products.

Four major hair care breakthroughs took place during the years from 1904 to 1909.

In 1904, a fireman was losing his hair. Like Madam Walker, he too experimented, hoping to find a hair grower. He developed many products, and people still use his shampoo today. His name was John Breck.

Madam Walker discovered her hair grower in 1905.

The following year, 1906, a London hair-

dresser invented the first permanent. The hair was dipped in ammonia, wrapped around safety pins, and heated with an iron! Charles Nestle was the man who changed hair fashion forever.

In 1909, Eugene Schueller, a French chemist, created the first commercial hair dye. His company is still in business today under the name of L'Oréal!

Source: *Gail B. Stewart*, *Timelines 1900s*, New York: Crestwood House, 1989.

An Apple for Everyone



Selected resources pertaining to Madam Walker and black History in Indiana

- *Black History News & Notes*. August 1991. Number 45.

This issue lists some of the Indiana African-American history collections at the Indiana Historical Society.

- Crenshaw, Gwendolyn J. *"Bury Me in a Free Land": The Abolitionist Movement in Indiana, 1816-1865*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1986.

This exhibit catalog provides excellent background information regarding blacks in Indiana. Adult readers.

- Bundles, A'Lelia Perry. *Madam C. J. Walker: Entrepreneur*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991.

This is an excellent source on the life of Madam Walker written by her great, great-granddaughter. The book includes wonderful photographs and fascinating information. Written for intermediate and advanced elementary school readers; fast and easy reading for secondary school students and adults. There currently is not an adult book written about Madam Walker although Alex Haley has researched one with the help of Ms. Bundles.

- Driskell, David, et al. *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*. New York: The Studio

Museum in Harlem & Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1987.

- Gibson-Hudson, Gloria J. "To all classes; to all races; this house is dedicated" The Walker Theatre Revisited." *Black History News & Notes*. February 1989. Number 35. pp. 4-6.

This is a good article about the Walker Theatre. The entire issue provides interesting information about the building and the Madame Walker Urban Life Center.

- Latham, Charles, Jr. "Madam C. J. Walker & Company." *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History*. Summer 1989. Vol. 1, No. 3. pp. 29-40.

- Phillips, Clifton J. *Indiana in Transition, 1880-1920*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, 1968.

Volume IV of the History of Indiana series is the standard reference for the turn of the century in Indiana.

- Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957.

This is a standard, classic work on the subject. For adult readers.

- Thornbrough, Emma Lou. *Since Emancipation: A Short History of Indiana Negroes, 1863-1963*. Indianapolis: Indiana Division American Negro

Emancipation Centennial Authority [1964].

Other Sources of Interest

- *Two Dollars and a Dream*.

This excellent 56 minute video is available free of charge (you must provide return postage, however) from the Indiana Humanities Council, 317-638-1500.

- D'Alelio, Jane. *I Know That Building!: Discovering Architecture with Activities and Games*. Washington D.C. The Preservation Press, 1989.

- **Special thanks to Wilma Gibbs**, Editor, *Black History News and Notes*, and Program Archivist, Indiana Historical Society, for her assistance and cooperation.

- **Special thanks to A'Lelia Perry Bundles** for allowing the *Indiana Junior Historian* to use photographs in the Walker Collection.

Note to Teachers

The next issue of *The Indiana Junior Historian* will highlight Women's History Month and continue to focus on Madam Walker. Topics will include Madam Walker's entrepreneurship; transportation and marketing at the turn of the century; and Madam Walker's political activism.

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The Indiana Historical Bureau was created in 1915 to celebrate the centennial of statehood. It is the duty of the Historical Bureau to edit and publish documentary and other material relating to the history of the state of Indiana, to promote the study of Indiana history, and to work with others engaged in such pursuits. The Historical Bureau provides books, educational resources, and programs for students and teachers. Several are listed below. The Bureau also directs the Historical Marker Program and the care of the Governors' Portraits Collection.

• **BROADSIDES** produces supplemental educational materials based on primary sources for teaching Indiana history. Student packets encourage active participation and skills development with possible integration in various grades and subjects. An extensive teacher guide provides ready information and teaching resources.

• **Indiana Close Up** is a high school local government program affiliated with the national Close Up Foundation. This participatory annual event encourages study and discussion through the Jefferson Meeting on the Indiana Constitution.

• **Indiana History Day** encourages students grades 4 - 12 to research and prepare papers, exhibits, performances and media presentations on an annual historical theme. An emphasis on original research and interpretation allows students to experience the excitement of discovering or developing skills and interests that enrich their education and their lives. It is part of the National History Day network.

• **REACH**— Resources Educating in the Arts, Culture, and History— is a dynamic program that utilizes art and objects to stimulate dialogue and provide hands-on experiences, exploring not only the arts but also the culture and history of Indiana. Its arts-in-education basis encourages on-going planning for involving community resources in the school.

The Indiana Junior Historical Society is a network of history clubs for students in grades 4 - 12. Locally sponsored clubs initiate and participate in activities which encourage the study of Indiana history, often outside the classroom. The Indiana Junior Historical Society program is administered by the Indiana Historical Society, 315 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202; 317-232-1882.

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