



Madam C. J. Walker

December 23, 1867 - May 25, 1919

Died: Irvington, New York

Interment: Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, New York

Madam C. J. Walker died at Villa Lewaro, the house she had built above the Hudson in Irvington, New York, on May 25, 1919. Kidney disease and hypertension had been working for years. She was fifty-one. Born Sarah Breedlove on December 23, 1867, on a Delta, Louisiana, cotton place, she was the first free child in a family that had been enslaved, orphaned at seven, married at fourteen, and widowed with a daughter at twenty.

She washed other people's clothes in St. Louis, lost her hair to scalp disease and lye, and built a business on a formula and a method: the Walker System of ointments, steel combs, and door-to-door agents - mostly Black women - who earned commissions instead of tips. Indianapolis became the factory town. She moved the headquarters there, trained "hair culturists," and paid them enough to buy houses. By the 1910s she was widely called the first self-made woman millionaire in America. The number was argued; the independence was not.

She funded scholarships, anti-lynching work, and a YMCA in Indianapolis. At the 1917 Negro Silent Protest Parade she walked. Villa Lewaro, designed by Vertner Tandy, was a statement in stucco that a washerwoman's daughter could live on millionaires' row and invite the race's intellectuals to dinner. She left the bulk of her estate to her daughter, A'Lelia, and to the institutions that had taken her checks when banks would not.

The funeral was in Irvington. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, not on the Hudson lawn.

Services

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