



Foundation Document Overview

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

Virginia



Contact Information

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Purpose



MAGGIE L. WALKER NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE preserves Maggie L. Walker's home and its setting within Jackson Ward and interprets her achievements as a civil rights activist and pioneering entrepreneur in Jim Crow-era Richmond, Virginia.



Significance

Significance statements express why Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The daughter of a former slave and a white Confederate soldier and a member of the first generation of African Americans to come of age in the wake of emancipation, Maggie L. Walker dedicated her life to creating opportunities for African American self-determination and full citizenship.
- In the former capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, Maggie L. Walker helped lay the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement both locally and nationally. She challenged legal segregation, economic oppression, and white male supremacy while striving for equal rights for women and promoting African American unity through her business practices, education advocacy, and impassioned speeches.
- In 1903 Walker became the first African American woman to found and charter a bank in the United States and serve as its president, thus fostering self-sufficiency and economic empowerment in the African American community.



Resources, Values, and Interpretive Themes



- Maggie L. Walker’s fully restored, furnished home at 110½ East Leigh Street and personal papers provide rare insight into the life of a successful African American businesswoman and social reform leader at the turn of the 20th century and illuminate her work ethic, personal and professional challenges, and successes in the Jim Crow era. From 1905 until her death in 1934, Walker’s “urban mansion” served as a social hub in Jackson Ward and a family sanctuary for four generations.
 - Maggie L. Walker’s prominent home embodied the values and achievements of the Jackson Ward neighborhood, a nationally recognized center of African American professional and commercial activities from Reconstruction through the Jim Crow era and today is a national historic landmark district.
 - Maggie L. Walker transformed the Independent Order of St. Luke from a struggling burial society to a thriving insurance company operating in more than 20 states with 100,000 members. Walker built on this success by serving on the national boards and influencing the direction of civil rights organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women, the NAACP, and the Urban League and through her collaborations with contemporaries such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Dubois, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary Church Terrell, and Mary McLeod Bethune.
- Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.
- **Maggie L. Walker House**
 - **Maggie L. Walker Museum Collections**
 - **Building Facades of 112, 114, 116, and 118 Leigh Street, and 600, 600½, and 602 North Second Street**
- Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from — and should reflect — park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.
- The daughter of a formerly enslaved woman and a white Confederate soldier, Maggie L. Walker was a member of the first generation of African Americans who confronted the challenges of legalized discrimination and oppression following the Civil War and forged a path toward economic and social self-determination for African Americans.
 - Maggie L. Walker was the first African American woman to found and charter a bank in the United States and serve as its president, thus fostering self-sufficiency and economic empowerment for African Americans.
 - In Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the Confederacy, Maggie L. Walker helped lay the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement, both locally and nationally, by challenging legal segregation, economic oppression, and white male authority in the struggle for equal rights for women, promoting African American unity through business, and serving as an advocate for education.

Description

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Richmond, Virginia, commemorates the life of Maggie L. Walker, a progressive and talented African American woman. Maggie Lena Walker was born in Richmond on July 15, 1864, during the final year of the American Civil War and became a strong leader in her community. Despite facing many adversities in post-Civil War Richmond, Walker achieved national acclaim as the leader of a fraternal organization and a member of countless national organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She became a national activist for economic independence, educational opportunities, and civil rights, particularly on behalf of women and children in the African American community.

Walker's path toward leadership began when she joined the Independent Order of St. Luke, a fraternal society with the primary aim of providing for the care of its members in the event of sickness, old age, or death. Under Walker's leadership, the society grew in membership and financial stability and moved in innovative directions. Her most noteworthy accomplishment as the order's leader was the founding of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in 1903. As its director, she was one of the nation's earliest female bank presidents and certainly the first African American woman to achieve that distinction. Due to her visionary leadership and sound business principles, Walker's bank survived the Great Depression and ultimately thrived as Consolidated Bank & Trust—the nation's longest running African American-owned bank. In addition to serving as chairman of banking operations, Walker edited the order's newspaper, *The St. Luke Herald*; developed a juvenile department that was designed to instill in Richmond youth the values of morality and diligence; and directed the construction of the St. Luke Building at 900 St. James Street.

Maggie L. Walker was a dynamic leader both in Jackson Ward and in national affairs, serving on numerous state and national boards, including the NAACP and the National Urban League. Her many books, photographs, and diaries describe her association with contemporary African American leaders, including

Mary McLeod Bethune, W. E. B. Du Bois, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Booker T. Washington. Through her local and national leadership, Walker fostered race pride, gender equality, and economic empowerment for a ravaged but resilient African American community during the height of the Jim Crow era.

Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site encompasses Walker's home at 110½ East Leigh Street within Richmond's Jackson Ward National Historic Landmark District, once one of the most prosperous African American communities in the United States. The park manages and administers six structures along roughly one-quarter of a city block at Second and East Leigh Streets in Richmond, including the Italianate-style Maggie L. Walker House, Walker's home of 30 years.

Visitor opportunities at the park include daily ranger-led guided tours of the house and exhibits and a new 20-minute orientation film. Visitors can also learn about Walker through a Google Cultural Exhibit page that features three virtual "exhibits," including self-guided tours of the Walker home and through the Maggie L. Walker Virtual Exhibit, an NPS website established in October 2011 that includes images and information about various aspects of Walker's life and a virtual tour of her home.

