

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Maggie Lena Walker

banker, leader

"No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow."

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Background Information

Born: July 15, 1864

Death: December 15, 1934

Maggie Lena Walker was born in Richmond, Virginia. Her stepfather was a butler, who died suddenly and left the family with money problems causing her mother to become a laundress to support Maggie and her sister Maggie graduated from what would become Richmond Public Schools in 1883.ⁱ Afterwards she worked as a teacher and continued her education by taking accounting classes on the side. She married Armstead Walker Jr. in 1886 and had three children.ⁱⁱ While growing up, she joined the Grand United Order of St. Luke, a fraternal organization. After teaching, she worked for this organization and worked her way up to the role of Chief in 1890. The organization was on the verge of bankruptcy when she took over.²

Walker's Resistance

Walker was prepared to help the Independent Order of St. Luke's money problems because of her background in accounting. She founded the St. Luke Herald, a newspaper to help carry news of the order to local chapters. Notably, Walker became the first African American female bank president in the nation. In 1903, Walker was the founder and president of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank. The bank not only attracted adults, but Walker worked to attract children. She passed out banks to encourage children to save their money early. In 1905, she opened the St. Luke Emporium, a department store in Richmond. In her time in the Independent Order of St. Luke's, the organization grew to more than 100,000 members in twenty-three states with a strong presence in cities.²

Achievements

In 1903, Walker became the first African American female bank president. She was a member of the National Association of Colored Women and helped found the Council of Colored Women as a state federation.² Walker has a high school named after her in Richmond, Virginia.¹

