



Madam C.J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove on December 23, 1867, near Delta, Louisiana. After suffering from a scalp ailment that resulted in her own hair loss, she invented a line of African-American hair care products in 1905. Promoting her products by travelling around the country giving lecture-demonstrations and eventually established Madame C.J. Walker Laboratories to manufacture cosmetics and train sales beauticians. Her savvy business acumen led her to be one of the first American women to become a self-made millionaire. She was also known for her philanthropic endeavours including donating the most substantial amount of money by an African-American toward the construction of an Indianapolis YMCA in 1913.

During the 1890s, Sarah Breedlove developed a scalp hair disorder that caused her to lose much of her hair, and she began to experiment with both home remedies and store-bought hair care treatments in an attempt to improve her condition. In 1905, Breedlove was employed as a commission agent by Annie Turnbo Malone — a successful, black, hair care product entrepreneur — and she moved to Denver, Colorado.

While there, Breedlove's husband Charles helped her create advertisements for a hair care treatment for African Americans that she was perfecting. Her husband also encouraged her to use the more recognisable name "Madam C.J. Walker," by which she was after that known.

In 1907 Walker and her husband travelled around the South and Southeast promoting her products and giving lecture demonstrations of her "Walker Method" — involving her own formula for pomade, brushing and the use of heated combs.

As profits continued to grow, in 1908 Walker opened a factory and a beauty school in Pittsburgh, and by 1910, when Walker transferred her business operations to Indianapolis, the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company had become wildly successful, with profits that were the modern-day equivalent of several million dollars. In Indianapolis, the company not only manufactured cosmetics but also trained sales beauticians. These "Walker Agents" became well known throughout the black communities of the United States. In turn, they promoted Walker's philosophy of "cleanliness and loveliness" as a means of advancing the status of African-Americans. An innovator, Walker organised clubs and conventions for her representatives, which recognised not only successful sales, but also philanthropic and educational efforts among African-Americans.