



## Jackson Ward Podcast

**David Ruth:** Welcome to the National Park Service’s podcast tour of the Jackson Ward Historic Landmark District in Richmond, Virginia. I’m David Ruth, Superintendent of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site located in the heart of Jackson Ward. Maggie Walker’s home has been a National Park since 1978. She lived in the ward from 1904 until her death in 1934. Her house, and the park’s visitor center, is surrounded by an incredible collection of historic sites that, together, make up this amazing story of Jackson Ward. During the early twentieth century, when Jim Crow segregation laws separated the races, Jackson Ward emerged into what has been called “The Cradle of Black Capitalism.” African Americans took to heart Maggie Walker’s words when she said: “Economic independence is the only independence in the world.” In Jackson Ward, more than 100 black-owned businesses, including insurance companies, six banks, two hospitals, law offices, the churches, a variety of clubs and other businesses all combined to create an affluent black middle class. Many prominent African Americans, like bank president Maggie Walker and newspaper editor John Mitchell, made their residences here. Her neighbors were leaders in national organizations such as the Afro-American Press Association and the National Dental and Medical Associations. This twelve-stop walking tour will introduce you to the people and institutions of Jackson Ward that flourished around Maggie Walker’s lifetime.

Before starting the one-mile walk, be sure to download the map at the park’s website at [www.nps.gov/mawa](http://www.nps.gov/mawa). Maps are also available at the park’s visitor center, located at the intersection of Second and Leigh Streets. At the end of each segment of the tour, please pause your listening device and then start it again at the beginning of the next stop. Original music recordings of the 1920s and 30s will help identify the breaks. Along the way, be sure to use the sidewalks and crosswalks for your safety. Now, let’s join our guide, the outstanding Richmond historian and author, Elvatrice Belsches. I hope you enjoy your tour.

[MUSIC]

**Elvatrice Belsches:** Welcome to the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site podcast tour of Historic Jackson Ward. We will start the tour at the 600-block of North Second Street and carefully cross over the intersection of Second and Leigh Street in the 500-block of North Second Street and continue forward and stop at 528 North Second Street.

[MUSIC]

### STOP #1

**EB:** Richmond has been called the “Harlem of the South” and no corridor underscores why better than North Second Street. One of the most popular entertainment venues for decades was the Hippodrome Theater, located to our right at 528 North Second Street. During its heyday, the Hippodrome was to Jackson Ward what the Apollo was to Harlem. This theater opened in around 1914 and, for several decades hosted some of the most popular vaudeville acts and movies starring African Americans. Internationally-known



musical performers like Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Duke Ellington, and James Brown also graced its stages. Many of the performers who played the Hippodrome stayed across the street at the famous African American-owned Slaughter's Hotel and the Miller's Hotel which was located on the southeast corner of Second and Leigh. Miller's Hotel would later become the Eggleston Hotel. All of these hotels have since been demolished.

As a continuation of Stop #1, we will travel next door to 526 North Second Street. This building was formerly the mansion of the Reverend W.L. Taylor. Reverend Taylor was the second national leader of Grand Worthy Master of the True Reformers. The True Reformers were inarguably the most powerful African American fraternal and business organization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many subsequent leaders of African American banks and insurance companies received their initial training with the True Reformers organization. The W.L. Taylor mansion, upon its completion in 1907, had over twenty rooms and was believed to be one of the largest residences built for an African American at that time in America. When Reverend Taylor and his family threw open the doors of their home to the public, for the official open house in February of 1908, it was a grand affair. Visitors were greeted at the door by none other than pioneering banker Mrs. Maggie L. Walker. The Taylor mansion was designed by noted African American architect J.A. Lankford of Washington, D.C. Lankford had several noteworthy commissions in Richmond. However, one of his most noteworthy commissions was the True Reformers' building which still stands, over a century later, at 12<sup>th</sup> and U Street in Washington, D.C.

Richmond has also been called "The Cradle of Black Capitalism" for good reason. Between the years of 1889 and 1929, there were six chartered African American-owned banks in Richmond and each had a presence in Jackson Ward. On North Second Street alone, there are three African American banks and at least four African American-owned insurance companies. Stop 2 will feature a building that formerly housed an historic African American-owned bank and insurance company.

We will continue now to the intersection of Second and Clay Street and carefully cross over to the other side of Clay and continue down to 212 East Clay Street. This will be Stop #2.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #2

**EB:** We are now at Stop #2 at 212 East Clay Street which sits on the corner of Third and Clay. This building formerly housed two historic African American business enterprises. The Southern Aid Insurance Company and the Mechanics Savings Bank.

If you turn and face the building, the right half of the building formerly housed the Mechanics Savings Bank. This bank was the third chartered by African Americans in Richmond. It was founded by John Mitchell, Jr. and it opened for business in January of 1902. Mitchell was a Jackson Ward-based African American journalist, editor, and proprietor of a newspaper. He was also a fraternal leader who had been on the Board of Directors of the True Reformers Bank. This location of the Mechanics Savings Bank was constructed in 1909 and opened for business in 1910. The bank was designed by a white



architect by the name of Carl Ruehrmund. The African American contractor in charge of construction was Daniel J. Farrar. Farrar apprenticed in the building trades under his father, Joseph E. Farrar, a leading African American contractor who served on City Council during the 1880s. The Mechanics Savings Bank failed in 1922.

The Southern Aid Society purchased the building in 1930 and added a four-story western and a northern wing to the building when it later became its headquarters. Founded in 1893 in Richmond, Southern Aid Insurance Company is believed to be the first chartered non-fraternal African American-run and owned industrial insurance company in the South. It is a prime example of how inextricably linked the African American churches and its pastors were to the major African American banks and insurance companies in Richmond. Southern Aid had, as its founding president, the Reverend Z.D. Lewis who pastored the Second Baptist Church. For decades, Southern Aid was the oldest African American-owned insurance company in America. It is no longer in existence.

At our next stop, Stop #3, we will learn more about A.D. Price who served as president of Southern Aid from 1905 until 1921 and as a director of the Mechanics Savings Bank. We will now round the corner and turn left, and continue down to the corner of Third and Leigh. We will carefully cross over the intersection.

[MUSIC]

### STOP #3

**EB:** We are now at Stop #3, at Third and Leigh Street. To our left is the former A.D. Price Funeral Home establishment of Alfred Douglas Price.

Price was born in 1860 in neighboring Hanover County. He came to Richmond and trained, initially, as a blacksmith and wheelwright before entering the funeral and livery business. Price began his funeral establishment in the early 1880s and it grew to become one of the largest African American-owned funeral establishments in the country. From his warehouse on Third Street, Price served as a wholesaler of funeral supplies to African Americans in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. As one of the largest African American real estate holders in Richmond, his council was sought by several banks and insurance companies and, as a result, Price served on many boards. Most notably, he served as a Director of the Mechanics Savings Bank, Maggie Walker's St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, the Commercial Bank and Trust, and the Richmond Hospital and Training School for Nurses. At his death in 1921, A.D. Price was a member of over thirty fraternal and business organizations. Our next stop will be near the corner of Third and Jackson Streets where we will explore the history of Third Street Bethel A.M.E. at 614 North Third Street and the former home of John Mitchell, Jr. We will walk down Third Street until we are near the corner of Third and Jackson.

[MUSIC]



## STOP #4

**EB:** We are now at Stop #4. Let's take a look at the residence to our right, directly across Third Street from the church.

This double-home, constructed in the Italianate style, was the former home of John Mitchell, Jr. To preserve this historic structure, it was moved from its original location at 515-517 North Third Street to the 600-block of North Third Street. John Mitchell Jr. was truly a renaissance man. He was born in 1863 at Laburnum in neighboring Henrico County and he attended the public schools of Richmond, graduating from Richmond Colored Normal in 1881. After a short stint in teaching, Mitchell would embark upon a career in journalism that would span nearly fifty years. He is perhaps best remembered for being the fiery, fearless editor and publisher of the *Richmond Planet* newspaper from 1884 until 1929. Mitchell used his pen as a sword to fight injustices locally and statewide. He also tirelessly fought for a federal anti-lynching bill. Mitchell served for a time as president of the Afro-American Press Association. As the founder and president of the Mechanics Savings Bank, he was for a number of years the lone African American member of the American Bankers Association. Mitchell was also very active in politics. He served on Richmond's City Council from 1888 until 1896 and he even ran for governor in 1921 on the Lily Black ticket which included pioneering banker, Mrs. Maggie L. Walker as a candidate for the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Mitchell also played a major role in the 1904 streetcar boycott in Richmond in response to discriminatory practices. John Mitchell, Jr. died in 1929.

Let's turn back to the church on your left. Third Street Bethel A.M.E. Church has a rich legacy indeed. This church traces its origins to the white-run Trinity Methodist Church. The African American members left to organize a church of their own and this church was built around 1856 by enslaved and free African Americans. Third Street Bethel A.M.E. was home to one of the earliest Freedman's Bureau schools in Richmond after the Civil War. Many schools were organized under the auspices of the Bureau to assist the newly freed in successfully transitioning from slavery to freedom. This church would become the site of several noted speeches. Pioneering female banker Maggie L. Walker delivered several noted addresses here including the one in 1901 that espoused the need for the creation of a bank by the Independent Order of St. Luke. Because of its rich legacies, the church is on both the state and national historic registries.

Our next stop is Stop #5 at the northeast side of Second and Jackson Street. We will now carefully cross to the north side of Third and Jackson and turn left and continue to the northeast intersection of Second and Jackson Streets.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #5

**EB:** We are now at Stop #5. We are facing two historic buildings which formerly housed two noted African American businesses.

The three-story building directly in front of us to the left formerly housed the Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company. Richmond Beneficial was organized in 1894 by a founding president, Reverend Wesley F. Graham and others. Graham, who was



pastor of the Fifth Street Baptist Church, would also found the American Beneficial Insurance Company in 1902. This building [which] would serve as headquarters for Richmond Beneficial opened to the public in June of 1912. As was customary for the time, this was a multi-purpose building. At the time of its opening it housed, in addition to the insurance company, the Capital Shoe Company and meeting rooms for rental to fraternal and social organizations. The Richmond Beneficial building had the distinction of being designed and constructed by African Americans. It was designed by professor Charles T. Russell, a native of Jackson Ward and one of the earliest licensed African American architects in Virginia. Russell received his training in the building arts at Hampton Institute and received further training at Tuskegee. He will design and oversee the major renovations of several notable African American businesses, residences, and churches. Professor Russell was also the founding president of the National Builders Association. The construction of this building was done by the African American firm of Moore and Archer. Henry J. Moore, of the firm, apprenticed under Joseph Farrar, the father of contractor Daniel J. Farrar. Moore also served on City Council during the 1890s. This insurance company no longer exists.

The small building next to the Richmond Beneficial building formerly housed the Second Street Savings Bank. The Second Street Savings Bank was chartered in 1920 making it the sixth bank to be chartered by African Americans in Richmond. Its founding president was John T. Taylor and the bank was closely aligned with the Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company next door. The Second Street Savings Bank was also designed by noted African American architect, professor Charles T. Russell and it was constructed by African American contractor Daniel J. Farrar. Due to a dwindling pool of depositors and an economic downturn, the shareholders of the Second Street Savings Bank and Maggie Walker's St. Luke Bank and Trust met in December of 1929 and voted to merge the two banks. The new bank opened for business in January of 1930 as the Consolidated Bank and Trust. The Commercial Bank and Trust would merge with Consolidated Bank and Trust approximately one year later to complete the merger of the three African American banks. For decades, Consolidated Bank and Trust was the oldest, continuously run African American-owned bank in America.

At our next stop at Stop #6, we'll see additional commissions by African American architect Charles Russell and learn more about Maggie Walker's Independent Order of St. Luke. We will now carefully cross the intersection of Second and Jackson Street and continue along Jackson and carefully cross the intersection at First and Jackson Streets. We will continue to travel down Jackson until we are mid-way between First and St. James Street on Jackson Street.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #6

**EB:** We are now at Stop #6, the Jackson Street vista. We will now turn our attention to the right where the dull roar in the distance signals the presence of Interstate 95. The Interstate, built in the 1950s, displaced many families in Jackson Ward and greatly affected its vibrant economy.



Look at the four-story light brown brick building on the other side of the interstate. This is the St. Luke Hall. The St. Luke Hall was completed in 1903 and served as headquarters for the Right Worthy Grand Council of the Independent Order of St. Luke. This powerful fraternal order was founded in 1867 by ex-slave Mary Prout in Baltimore. Like the True Reformers, the St. Luke organization would grow to include a bank, a newspaper, and upwards of 100,000 members in several states. The St. Luke Hall also housed the St. Luke Press which produced the *St. Luke Herald*, the newspaper published by the order, and it served as the first home of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank when it was founded in 1903. With the founding of the bank, Maggie L. Walker, who was by then Right Worthy Grand Secretary Treasurer, became the first African American woman to found and become president of a chartered bank in America. This building would later undergo an extensive renovation with the addition of a fourth floor. This complex remodeling was overseen by African American architect Charles T. Russell.

If we look to the left we will see the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church. Sixth Mount Zion was home to one of the most celebrated African American preachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Reverend John Jasper. Reverend Jasper and several other organizers founded Sixth Mount Zion in an abandoned Confederate horse stable on Brown's Island in 1867. They moved to their present location at 14 Duval Street around 1869 and built the current sanctuary in the late 1880s. The contractor who oversaw the construction of the church was George W. Boyd, an African American contractor who was considered to be the leading African American contractor in Richmond during the late 1800s. Sixth Mount Zion's celebrated pastor became nationally known for his sermon "De Sun Do Move," initially delivered in 1878. Jasper would deliver the sermon over 250 additional times in several states and even once before the state legislature of Virginia. Reverend Jasper died in 1901. The Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church is listed on both the state and national historic registries.

Our next stop will be Stop #7 which will be at 105 West Jackson Street. We will continue along Jackson Street and cross over St. James Street and stop at the corner of Jackson Street and Chamberlayne Parkway where we will talk about the W.W. Brown home.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #7

**EB:** We are now at Stop #7.

The W.W. Brown home is the fourth house from the corner of Price and Jackson Streets. This Federal-styled brick home, with beige trim, is located at 105 West Jackson Street at the intersection of Chamberlayne Parkway and Jackson Street. Built in the 1840s, this is the former home of Reverend William Washington Brown. Brown was born in 1849 in Habersham County, Georgia and escaped from slavery as a boy and traveled throughout the South. He later joined the Union Army and attained an education. He was summoned to Richmond around 1881 by members of the temperance organization, the True Reformers, and subsequently transformed the True Reformers into one of the largest African American fraternal and business enterprises in America. The



True Reformers made African American business history when, in March of 1888, they received a charter from the state of Virginia to open the Savings Bank of the Grand Fountain of the United Order of True Reformers. Thus, the True Reformers bank became the first chartered by African Americans in America. The bank opened for business on April 3, 1889 in Brown's home, here at 105 West Jackson Street. The symbolic date of April 3 was chosen because it was the anniversary month and date of the arrival of Union troops in Richmond after the fall of the city at the end of the Civil War. It should be noted that the former Capital Savings Bank of Washington, D.C. received its charter in October of 1888 and opened shortly thereafter and prior to the opening of the True Reformers bank. However, the True Reformers bank retained the distinction of having been the first African American-owned bank chartered in America. The bank was later housed in the True Reformers Hall in the 600-block of North Second Street. The bank collapsed in 1910.

We will now continue on to Stop #8, the Bill "Bojangles" Robinson statue. We will cross over Jackson Street and walk down along Chamberlayne Parkway until we get to the corner of North Adams, West Leigh Street, and Chamberlayne Parkway.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #8

**EB:** We are now at Stop #8. Let's turn and face the statue at the middle of the intersection. It memorializes one of Richmond's most well-known native sons.

Bill "Bojangles" Robinson was born Luther Robinson in Jackson Ward in 1878. As a youngster, Robinson reportedly took the first name of his younger brother. He began to shine shoes and dance at an early age and his gifts did not go unnoticed. Before long, he began to travel with vaudeville acts up and down the East Coast. His innovative tap dancing routines would bring him critical acclaim. Robinson starred in over a dozen films, co-starring opposite child star Shirley Temple in several of the films. Bill "Bojangles" Robinson is not only remembered for his innovative tap dancing techniques but for his philanthropy as well. As he traveled, during one of his visits back home through the intersection that now surrounds his statue, he observed a child narrowly escape being struck by a car. Robinson paid over a thousand dollars to have a light erected at this intersection. Robinson also served his country in World War I as a member of the 369<sup>th</sup> Regiment from New York. Robinson was honored during his lifetime when a theater was built and named in his honor in the Church Hill section of Richmond. Some of the elder residents of Church Hill remember his return for the grand opening of the theater. Bill Robinson died in 1949. In a lasting tribute to his legacy, the Astoria Beneficial Club commissioned sculptor Jim Witt [sp.?] to create this statue of Robinson and it was unveiled in 1973.

Our next stop will be Stop #9. We will now carefully cross West Leigh Street and continue on North Adams until we are in front of the home at 513 North Adams.

[MUSIC]



## STOP #9

**EB:** Stop #9 at 513 North Adams Street is the former home of Mrs. Rosa D. Bowser. Born in 1855, in neighboring Amelia County, she relocated with her parents to Richmond after the Civil War. She graduated from one of the earliest classes at Richmond Colored Normal and High School and would embark upon a career as a noted educator and nationally known club woman. Bowser developed night classes and led summer teaching institutes throughout the state of Virginia for African American educators. She would later become a founder and president of the Virginia State Teachers Association. Mrs. Bowser also led parenting classes and became a powerful figure in the National Association of Colored Women's clubs. She also became an elected leader with a separate faction of the Independent Order of St. Luke. Bowser was also integral in raising money for the opening of the Richmond Hospital and Training School for Nurses. Her son, Dr. O.B.H. Bowser, who also resided with his family at this home, was a 1901 graduate of the medical school of Howard University. He would help found, along with others, the African American-owned Richmond Hospital and Training School for Nurses which continues over a century later as Bon Secours Richmond Community Hospital. Mrs. Bowser was honored before her death in 1931 by having the first African American branch of the Richmond Public Library named in her honor. Her former home is a private residence.

We will now continue to Stop #10 by continuing along North Adams until we reach the intersection of North Adams and Clay Street. We will turn left and continue along Clay Street and cross over St. James Street.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #10

**EB:** We are now at Stop #10. Let's turn our attention to 00 Clay Street, the large building directly across the street.

Built in 1832, this building was formerly the home of baker Adolf Dill. It would later be purchased by Maggie Walker's CCW, or Council of Colored Women. This organization raised much-needed money for the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls in Hanover County. The building also served, reportedly, as a meeting place for African American soldiers and the early Richmond NAACP. 00 Clay Street would later become home to the first branch of the Richmond Public Library for African Americans. The branch was named in honor of noted educator, Rosa Bowser. Later, a school bearing her name would also occupy this building. Today, 00 Clay Street is home to the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, one of the largest African American history museums in the state of Virginia.

Our next stop is Stop #11, the former home of a noted early school for African Americans. We will now continue down to the corner of First and Clay and carefully cross over First Street where we will immediately turn left and continue on to the corner of First and Leigh Street.

[MUSIC]





## STOP #11

**EB:** We are now at Stop #11. The building on our left, across the street, is the former Richmond Colored Normal and Armstrong High School.

The Richmond Colored Normal and High was organized under the auspices of the Freedman's Bureau in October of 1867. It was moved to this location in around 1910. Prior to the relocation of Richmond Colored Normal to this building, it was initially the Leigh School for White Peoples and its construction dates to around 1871. After the previous location of Richmond Colored Normal fell into disrepair, it was moved to this location in around 1910. Shortly thereafter, it was renamed Armstrong High School in honor of the founder of Hampton Institute, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. After the relocation of Armstrong High School, this building also served as Booker T. Washington Junior High. Notables who attended Richmond Colored Normal included Rosa Bowser, Virginia Randolph, Dr. Sarah G. Jones – the first woman of any race to be granted a license to practice medicine by the Virginia State Board of Medicine – pioneering banker Maggie Walker, John Mitchell, Jr., and Wendell P. Dabney who would go on to found a newspaper in Cincinnati and write a biography of his classmate, Maggie Walker.

Our next and final stop is Stop #12. We will turn right on East Leigh Street and continue down to the middle of the block.

[MUSIC]

## STOP #12

**EB:** This is Stop #12. The East 100-block of Leigh Street was known as "Quality Row," not only for the residences but for the outstanding achievements of its former residents. Let's turn our attention to the right.

107 East Leigh was the former home of Dr. David A. Ferguson, an 1899 graduate of Howard University's dental school. He would go on to found the National Dental Association and become the first non-physician president of the National Medical Association. Now let's turn our attention to the left side of "Quality Row."

110 East Leigh was the former home of Dr. Leon Reid and his family. Dr. Reid, a leading African American dentist, served as president of the National Dental Association and served on the Board of Directors of the Consolidated Bank and Trust. Dr. and Mrs. Reid's son, Dr. William Ferguson Reid, would become a surgeon and become the first African American elected to the Virginia General Assembly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The corner residence to our right is 118 East Leigh Street. Although it is now a part of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, it once housed the law firm of noted civil rights attorney Oliver W. Hill and his associates. Oliver Hill and colleagues, Martin A. Martin and Spotswood Robinson, argued many desegregation cases. However, their most celebrated case was *Dorothy Davis et al. vs. the county School Board of Prince Edward County*. This case became one of the five cases heard before the United States Supreme Court as a part of the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision of 1954. This pivotal case overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine. Let's direct our attention



now to the former home of Maggie L. Walker at 110 ½ East Leigh, the building with green and white awnings.

This home was originally built in late 1882 by African American contractor George W. Boyd for African American physician Dr. J.C. Ferguson. African American physician, Dr. Robert E. Jones, purchased it in 1889 and enlarged it. Dr. Jones would found the first African American-run hospital in Richmond and would also serve as an early president of the National Medical Association.

We now know that Mrs. Maggie L. Walker was born in 1864 and not 1867 as was previously believed. She attended the public schools of Richmond, graduating from Richmond Colored Normal in 1883. She taught for several years before embarking upon a career in business and organizational leadership that would propel her into national prominence. Walker would go on to lead the Independent Order of St. Luke. She would become the first African American woman to found and become president of a chartered bank in America and, in addition, she founded and edited the *St. Luke Herald* newspaper. Walker promoted home ownership and thrift. She gave freely of her personal resources. Her contributions to her community, locally, and at large were vast. She was a founder and president of the Richmond NAACP and a leader of a forerunner of the Richmond Urban League. Walker worked with African American notables also on the national level and her counsel was sought by many dignitaries. As a testament to her national stature, one need only look at some of the former guests at her residence. They included Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, Langston Hughes, and countless others who were leaders in their professions. Walker would reside in her home until her death in 1934. The residence remained in the family until 1979 when it was officially deeded to the National Park Service. The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site opened to the public in 1985 and, today, the home is registered on both the state and national registries of historic places.

[MUSIC]

**EB:** The contributions of Mrs. Walker and others in Jackson Ward and beyond cannot be overstated. Many who called the ward home made tremendous contributions at the national level in fields as diverse as law, business, journalism, education, and organizational leadership. Their legacies are truly ones of hope and remembrance. I'm Elvatrice Belsches. Thank you for joining us in this tour of historic Jackson Ward.

[MUSIC]

**DR:** Well, this concludes our tour. I hope that Mrs. Belsches' amazing stories of Jackson Ward's businesses, clubs, hotels, churches, and accomplished residents brought to life this incredible story of African American triumph and success. If you are listening to this podcast at home, please be sure to visit the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site Visitor Center, located at 600 North Second Street, the next time you are in Richmond. Thank you.