(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

1. Name of Property

historic name: Walker, Madame C.J., Building

other name/site number: Walker Theater

2. Location

street & number: 617 Indiana Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Indianapolis vicinity: N/A

state: IN county: Marion code: 097 zip code: 46202

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. ___ See continuation sheet.

_____ _____
Signature of certifying official Date

_____
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. ___ See continuation sheet.

_____ _____
Signature of commenting or other official Date

_____
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

____	entered in the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____	determined eligible for the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____	determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
____	removed from the National Register	_____	_____
____	other (explain): _____		

_____ _____ _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic:	industry	Sub:	manufacturing facility
	recreation and culture		theater
	commerce/trade		specialty stores
	commerce/trade		business
Current :	industry	Sub:	manufacturing facility
	recreation and culture		theater
	social		civic
	commerce/trade		business

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Modern Movement
Art Deco

Other Description: Contains African, Moorish, and Egyptian Motifs

Materials: foundation - faced concrete
walls - brick
roof - asphalt
other terra cotta (decorative elements)

Describe present and historic physical appearance. _X_ See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, B
National Historic Landmark Criteria: 1, 2
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: ethnic heritage- black
social history
invention
entertainment/recreation
commerce

National Historic Landmark Themes: XXX-American Ways of Life; E-Ethnic Communities

XII-Business
B-Manufacturing
9-Other (Beauty Aids)
D-Trade
3-Retail
K-Business Organization

Period(s) of Significance: 1927-1940

Significant Dates : 1927

Significant Person(s): Walker, Madame C.J. (Sarah Breedlove)

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: W. Jungclaus
Rubush and Hunter

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
_X_ See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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_X_ See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

_ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
X previously listed in the National Register
_ previously determined eligible by the National Register
_ designated a National Historic Landmark
_ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
_ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

X State historic preservation office
_ Other state agency
X Federal agency
_ Local government
_ University
_ Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	16	571350	4403000	B	__	_____	_____
C	__	_____	_____	D	__	_____	_____

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at the point where the western curb line of North West Street meets the northeastern curb line of Indiana Avenue, thence running in a northwesterly direction along the northeast curb of Indiana Avenue to a point five feet north of the northernmost wall of the Walker Building, thence in an easterly direction running parallel to and five feet north of the northern wall of the Walker Building to the western curb line of North West Street, thence in a southeasterly direction along the west curb line of North West Street to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director

Organization: National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History Date: June 4, 1990

Street & Number: 400 A Street, SE Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington State: DC ZIP: 20003

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

The Walker Building is a four story, yellow tapestry brick-faced, reinforced concrete building with a triangular "flatiron" plan. The two major facades occupy a half block of West Street and Indiana Avenue, in a near-downtown commercial area.

The first floor of the south (Indiana Avenue) facade contains storefronts and the entrance to the Walker Theater, while the clearly secondary east (West Street) facade contains the stage entrance and emergency exits for the Theater. Another entrance is located in the one-bay "point" of the triangle. All major ground-level openings on the principle facades are surrounded by terra cotta. Sides are buff-colored, whereas heads feature molded African motifs in bright colors. Doorway heads feature terra cotta masks clearly adapted from Yoruba designs.

Above the ground floor is a terra cotta string course. The upper levels of the building are divided into twelve major bays on the main (south) facade, and nine major bays on the east.

Major bays are defined by double pilasters rising to just below the parapet. Each of these major bays is divided into two or three parts by smaller pilasters rising to just above the fourth floor windows. Each pilaster terminates in a terra cotta cap with colorful decorative insets. The second and third floors have a double hung sash, while the original sashes on the fourth floor have been replaced by casement windows.

A parapet extends over the central ten bays of the south facade, repeating the decorative motifs of the lower levels. Smaller parapets are on the "point" of the building and the east facade. The rear of the east facade is one-half story higher to accommodate the stage equipment of the theater. The principal facades of the building are capped by terra cotta coping.

The rear wall of the building is of red brick with the concrete structural members visible.

The small one-bay facade facing southeast down Indiana Avenue toward Monument Circle served as the entrance to the Walker Drug Store and the Coffee Pot Restaurant when the building was more prosperous. It was extensively redecorated in the 1960's with a new doorway and some alterations to the windows. A clock, although stopped, remains just below the decorated parapet.

The Theater marquee and box office. typical of construction and design during the twenties, have a primarily Moorish reference. The theater itself, once a

showcase in Indianapolis and host to the best traveling shows and motion pictures, occupies the largest portion of the building. It has a small but elaborately decorated lobby. Between the lobby and the theater is a wooden screen of turned spindles paneled to a height of about six feet. Sphinxes flank the stage, and doorways in the walls on either side of the stage are an interesting combination of Egyptian and Moorish design. The architraves of the doorways are clearly Egyptian, while the imposts and lintels are Moorish. The former lofts for the organ pipes are segmentally arched with turned spindles forming a screen over the openings. Each loft is flanked by a long spear extending to the elaborately decorated balcony.

Decorations on the ceiling, some used as brackets for chandeliers, represent a highly intricate design with a strong but general African reference having a variety of masks, animals, and other symbols.

A ballroom with a stage on the fourth floor, although extensively redecorated, shows evidence of having had the same type of decorations as the theater.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The hub of the black beauty industry initiated and developed by Madame C. J. Walker, was the Walker Building in Indianapolis, IN, the national headquarters and manufacturing site where approximately three thousand women were employed. Madam Walker was the first black woman to open the field of cosmetology as a new and lucrative industry for black women. Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework, the Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company has national significance under theme: XII. Business (B) Manufacturing Organizations, 9. Other, and it also has significance under theme: XXX. American Ways of Life (E) Ethnic Communities. The Walker Company was not only a center for black female employment but it also served as a community cultural center, housing a ballroom and a theater.

Madame C.J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in the Louisiana Delta in 1867. She was orphaned at age seven, and moved in with her married sister, Louvenia. She moved to Vicksburg, Mississippi when she was ten and married Moses McWilliams four years later. He was killed in a race riot in 1887, leaving twenty year old Sarah and their infant daughter A'Lelia alone. Sarah Breedlove McWilliams moved once again to St. Louis, where she supported herself as a laundress. She was struggling to make ends meet, yet at the same time her hair was falling out. She experimented with hair products already on the market, but nothing was helping her hair. finally, in a dream, she discovered the solution. She mixed a lotion containing ingredients from both America and Africa and applied it. To her surprise, her hair grew back. She tried some on her friend's hair, also with favorable results, and in 1905, with $1.50, she went into business.

Breedlove moved to Denver and began marketing her product. She married Charles J. Walker in 1906, and soon became known as Madame C.J. Walker. Charles Walker was experienced in mail order and advertising and thus added a new dimension to her business. He was not as ambitious as she was, as Madam Walker described. "When I started in business with him I had disagreements. For when we began to make $10 a day, he thought that was enough, thought I should be satisfied. But I was convinced that my hair preparation would fill a long-felt want. And when we found it impossible to agree, due to his narrowness of vision, I embarked on business for myself."[1] Walker had a unique organizational ability. She put twenty-one year old A'Lelia in charge of the mail-order branch of the business, and she traveled around the country promoting her product. As a result her business grew and in 1908, Walker and A'Lelia settled in Pittsburgh where they established Lelia College, a training facility for the Walker System. A'Lelia ran both the school and the manufacturing aspects of the business while Madam Walker introduced her products to black women throughout the country. At a stop in Indianapolis, she was so impressed with the

area that she moved her entire operation there in 1910.

The Indianapolis branch of the business was run by Freeman B. Ransom, a talented lawyer who shared Walker's dream of racial progress. After the move from Pittsburgh, A'Lelia moved to New York to expand the East Coast operation and open a second Lelia College. Madame Walker continued to travel.[2]

Madame C.J. Walker's beauty business made it possible for black women to enhance their physical appearance, and it created new job opportunities for black women primarily as hairdressers and as sales agents (known as "Walker Agents"). "Dressed in white shirtwaists tucked into long black skirts," Walker Agents were imposing figures as they traveled from home to home selling Madame C. J. Walker beauty preparations. Frequently denied job opportunities available to white women and black men, the black women hired as agents found their work as a source of pride, as well as income.[3] As the few jobs open to black women were mostly domestic positions, Walker provided a rare opportunity to achieve a higher occupational status, and better wages.[4] In 1913 she spoke at the National Negro Business League, addressing a mostly male audience she said "the girls and women of our race must not be afraid to take hold of business endeavors. I started eight years ago with one dollar and fifty cents. Now I am giving employment to more than a thousand women . . . I have made it possible for many colored women to abandon the washtub for a more pleasant and profitable occupation."[5] No report on Harlem businesses would be complete with out mentioning Madame C.J. Walker, for not only was she significant as a woman in business, but also as a black in business. For years, the Walker Company was the most successful black business in the United States.[6]

Walker's establishment of black women in business stretched from the president of the company, down to the sales force. According to the company charter, the president has always, and will always, be a woman. After Madame Walker's death, the position was held by her daughter, granddaughter, and great-granddaughter and is currently being held by F.B. Ransom's daughter, A'Lelia Ransom Nelson.[7] Even the foreman of the manufacturing company, Alice P. Kelley, was a woman.

The Walker agents developed as Walker's business grew. Despite her travels, Walker knew that she was incapable of meeting the demand for her hair care products. Thus, she recruited and trained a national sales force that was virtually all female. Following the pattern of the Avon lady, these Walker agents walked through both rural and urban communities teaching women to set up beauty shops in their homes, keep records and be professional. By 1910 there were 5000 agents throughout the country,and the Walker Company was making $7000 per week. In 1917, 200 Walker agents met in Philadelphia for the first convention of the Madame C.J. Walker Hair Culturists' Union of America. Here they learned new techniques, and shared

experiences. One agent wrote that Madame Walker "opened up a trade for hundreds of colored women to make an honest and profitable living where they make as much in one week as a month's salary would bring from any other position that a colored woman can secure." These employed women were now able to educate their children, buy homes and support various charitable organizations. Walker's message-- that there were other options for economic independence-- was clear.[8]

In addition to employing large numbers of women, historian Paula Giddings asserts that Walker indirectly helped black women get jobs by improving their appearance.[9] Walker believed that one of the ways to access American places of power was to be well groomed; if black women looked more "acceptable" they could move into the mainstream of society.[10] Contrary to some opinion, Walker's products were not designed to straighten hair, but rather to help women who had problems with their scalp and hair. For this reason, Walker agents were called "hair culturists," or "scalp specialists."[11]

The Walker System consisted of an elaborate regimen of services and products. The original treatment involved shampoo, application of the Wonderful Hair Grower, and combing with Walker's special, patented comb. By the 1920's, the Walker System grew to include facials, manicures, and make-up application, and diet and weight control advice. The number of available products also increased, although the Walker Manufacturing Company insisted that all products were free from harsh chemicals. According to the Walker Training Manual, "never before in the history of women has the general appearance been so improved."[12]

The Walker Building reflected not only Madame Walker's commitment to the employment of blacks but also her promotion of arts in the black community. This building was the first black owned and operated theater building in the country. After being denied admission to an Indianapolis movie theater because of her race, Madame Walker decided to build a theater where blacks could forget about racial barriers and enjoy entertainment. She died before this dream was realized, but her daughter A'Lelia succeeded in fulfilling her mother's dream. The Walker Building was to "serve as the social and cultural center of the black community in Indianapolis," providing not only an artistic haven, but but also as a facility designed to serve all those affected by racism. The building, designed by the architectural firm of Rubush and Hunter, was a structure housing the Walker Manufacturing Company, the Walker Casino, the Walker Beauty Shop, the Walker Drug Store, the Walker Coffee Pot, as well as numerous offices and the famed Walker Theater. The lavish theater was decorated in an African motif; spears, monkeys, sphinxes, and moorish arches adorned the walls, celebrating black African heritage. It was run by the Walker Theater Company, an entity separate from the Walker Manufacturing Company who owned the building. The theater company leased space from the manufacturing company, and

managed to retain control of the theater until the mid-1930's; the theater experienced financial difficulties and fell into the hands of outside managers. The Walker Theater first opened on December 26, 1927 to a full house, booking only top quality entertainment, usually consisting of a feature film, a jazz band and organ selections. Despite the nation's economic difficulty, the theater was popular because of segregation and community cohesion. The community needed an escape; movies and jazz provided this escape from the desperate reality of the Great Depression.[13]

Today the Walker Building is once again a theater and community center. The Walker Manufacturing Company is the only establishment to remain in the building since it opened in 1927. Urban renewal, desegregation and suburban settlement all had an effect on the downtown Indianapolis area and thus the Walker Building; the theater finally closed in 1978. A group of concerned citizens formed the Madame Walker Urban Life Center as a non-profit organization designed to save the Walker Building from demolition and provide community outreach services in 1979. The newly restored building currently houses professional offices, community organizations, and small service oriented businesses along with the Casino Ballroom and Lounge with decor emphasizing the early years of the building. The Walker Theater re-opened in 1988, after careful reconstruction, and is still a tribute to African and African-American cultures. It is one of the few, if only, remaining examples of Africanized architecture popularized in the 1920's and 1930's.

Although there were other black hair care product companies, no other competitor was as successful or had as far reaching implications with regard to women in business. Mary McLeod Bethune wrote to A'Lelia Walker following her mother's death, "she was the clearest demonstration I know of Negro woman's ability recorded in history. She has gone, but her work still lives, and shall live as an inspiration, to not only her race, but to the world."[14]

[1]A'Lelia Perry Bundles, "Black Foremothers: Our Creative Trail Blazers," Spelman Messenger (Campus Issue, 1983), 19.
[2]A'Lelia P. Bundles, "Madame C.J. Walker: Cosmetics Tycoon," Ms. (July 1983), 93.
[3]Dorothy M. Brown, Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920's (Boston, 1987), 61.
[4]Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow (New York, 1985), 181.
[5]Bundles, "Cosmetics Tycoon," 91.
[6]Claude McKay, Harlem Negro Metropolis (New York, 1940), 97.
[7]Bundles, "Cosmetics Tycoon," 94.
[8]Bundles, "Cosmetics Tycoon," 92-93.

[9]Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York, 1984), 188.

[10]Bundles, "Cosmetics Tycoon," 92.

[11]Giddings, 1980.

[12]Madame C.J. Walker, The Madame C.J. Walker Beauty Manual (Indianapolis, 1928), 24.

[13]Gloria J. Gibson-Hudson, "'To All Classes; To All Races; This House is Dedicated': The Walker Theater Revisited," Black History News & Notes (February 1989), 4.

[14]Bundles, "Cosmetics Tycoon," 94.

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