

Mae Walker

Noblesville, Hamilton County

Madam C. J. Walker, the famous Hoosier African American cosmetics millionaire, had an interesting connection to Hamilton County. In 1912, Walker's daughter A'Lelia adopted a young woman named Fairy Mae Bryant. Fairy Mae was the daughter of Perry Bryant, who worked in the boiler room of the Model Mill Company in Noblesville. Perry was born in Missouri and had moved to Indiana where he married Sarah Etta Hammond. Sarah's family was from the Roberts Settlement, an important African American farm community in Indiana.

Fairy Mae was the third of seven children. The family first lived in the Federal Hill area, later moving to West Hannibal Street. The Bryants were very involved with the Bethel A.M.E. church and the African American Masonic lodge in town. Tragedy struck in June of 1909 when Perry Bryant died, and the family was left destitute. He is buried in Riverside Cemetery.

The connections between the families began because members of Fairy Mae's family were acquaintance of Madam Walker. Madam Walker also had visited Noblesville in 1910 to attend a Bethel A. M. E. church event. After her adoption, Mae lived in Pittsburgh with A'Lelia Walker, then moved with her to Harlem in 1913. During this time, Mae also traveled with Madam Walker, assisting her on business trips and serving as a model for Walker products. From 1916 to 1920, Mae was a student at Spelman University. She later married and had children.

When Madam Walker died in 1919, A'Lelia became president of the Walker cosmetics company. When A'Lelia died in 1931, Mae assumed responsibility for the company and remained in charge until she died in 1945. The story is told in more detail in the book "On Her Own Ground", the biography of Madam Walker written by her great-great-granddaughter, A'Lelia Bundles.



Photo Courtesy: <http://www.aleliabundles.com/2011/12/01/my-grandmothers-harlem-renaissance-wedding/>

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References will be published at the end of Women's History Month.