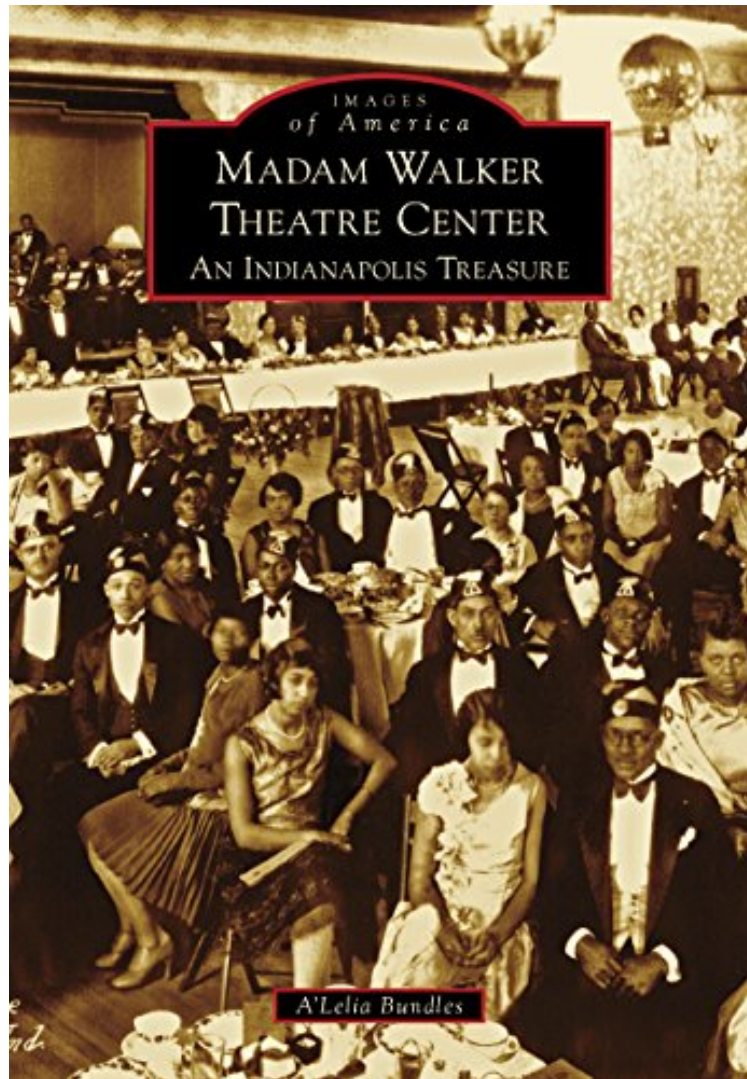


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Madame Walker Theatre Center: An Indianapolis Treasure (Images of America)

A'Leila Bundles

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A'Leila Bundles : Madame Walker Theatre Center: An Indianapolis Treasure (Images of America) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Madame Walker Theatre Center: An Indianapolis Treasure (Images of America):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Madam Walker and her TheatreBy Robin Friedman"Madam Walker Theatre Centre: An Indianapolis Treasure" (2013) by A'Leila Bundles is a short photographic history of Madam C.J. Walker and of the Indianapolis theatre she envisioned and which bears her name. A'Leila Bundles is the great-great-granddaughter of Madam Walker and has had a remarkable career in her own right. Bundles is an Emmy award-

winning producer and former ABC News Executive and trustee of Columbia University. She is the author of a highly regarded biography of Madam Walker, "On Her own Ground". On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker (Lisa Drew Books)The first self-made woman American millionaire, Walker (1867 -- 1919) led an inspiring life. Born Sarah Breedlove in Louisiana to newly-freed slaves, Walker was orphaned at the age of seven and a widow with a child by 20. She supported herself as a washerwoman for two decades. When Walker became concerned over her hair loss in her late 30s, she discovered and began selling a product for hair restoration which became known as "Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower". Walker began manufacturing a line of hair and other cosmetic products to African American women. She franchised her products and established a nation-wide system of schools for African American beauticians and cosmetologists. With her business acumen and real estate savvy, Madame Walker became wealthy. She moved her business from Denver to Pittsburgh to Indianapolis and ultimately to Harlem and to the Hudson River where she built a large mansion just before her 1919 death. In 1914, angered at her treatment by a segregated Indianapolis theatre, Madam Walker purchased a large city block in the city's African American district to house her company's headquarters and factory. The complex, a large four story building which included a drugstore, beauty salon, a beauty school, professional offices, ballroom, and 1500 seat theater, opened just after Christmas in December, 1927 and served for many years as a community landmark and as the headquarters for the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. In the 1970's the building had fallen into disrepair and was about to be demolished. The Walker cosmetics business was sold in 1985. With community effort, the building was painstakingly restored and reopened in 1988 as the Madam Walker Theatre Center. In 1991, the Walker Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Madam Walker, her business endeavors, and her theater are wonderful to get to know and Bundles tells their stories well with beautiful photographs. The book covers Walker's early life, her business associates, the products she manufactured, the cosmetology school, the theater, and much more. The book includes photographs of urban Indianapolis through the mid-20th Century and beyond, of advertisements over the years for Madame Walker's products, of her schools, and of the businesses in the Walker Building that are good to have in a short book and that capture a great deal about Madam Walker. This little book might well have been expanded into several volumes. It covers the opening of the Walker Building and its restoration during the 1980s but has relatively little about the theater and its activities during the intervening years. Instead, most of the book is devoted to Madam Walker, her far-flung businesses, and her successors in the Walker family. While fascinating and important, the focus of the book is not on the Madam Walker Theatre Center. The book offers an excellent quick introduction to African American entrepreneurship, to the continued lure of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps, and to Madam Walker. I enjoyed learning more about her in this book, which is part of the "Images of America" series of local American photographic histories published by Arcadia Publishers. Robin Friedman

As they watched construction of the block-long flatiron building brick by brick throughout 1927, African American residents of Indianapolis could scarcely contain their pride. This new headquarters of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, with its terra-cotta trimmed facade, was to be more than corporate offices and a factory for what then was one of America's most successful black businesses. In fact, it was designed as a city within a city, with an African Art Deco theater, ballroom, restaurant, drugstore, beauty salon, beauty school, and medical offices. Generations of African American families met for Sunday dinner at the Coffee Pot, enjoyed first-run movies and live performances in the Walker Theatre, and hosted dances in the Casino. Today, this National Historic Landmark is an arts center anchoring the Indiana Avenue Cultural District.

About the Author: Lelia Bundles is an author, Emmy award-winning producer, and former ABC News executive. On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker, her biography of her great-great-grandmother, was named a New York Times Notable Book. She is chairman of the board of the Foundation for the National Archives, a Columbia University trustee, and president of the Madam Walker Family Archives.