

Annie Minerva Turnbo Malone



Annie Minerva Turnbo Malone : August 9, 1877 – May 10, 1957. One of the first African-American women to be a millionaire, she was the inventor of the hair care products company Poro Products, created a school of cosmetology and a community learning center, and served as the benefactor of the St. Louis Colored Orphans Home.

Annie Minerva Turnbo was born to Robert Turnbo, a former slave who served in the Union Army for the 1st Kentucky Infantry and Isabella Turnbo, also a former slave. Annie was the tenth child of eleven in her family. After the death of her parents, when Malone was still a child, Annie was sent to live with an older sister. While attending school, she became interested in chemistry but had to withdraw from classes due to an illness. After leaving school, Annie and her sister began experimenting with homemade recipes and chemistry formulas to create hair and cosmetic products. In the 1890's, it was common for African-American women to try to straighten their hair and Anne wanted to make products that helped keep a healthy hair and scalp, straighten or keep natural curls, and to make hair manageable while using an iron or other hair styling tools. During her time a wide range of harsh chemicals and oils were used for hair and skin treatments that actually harmed the user.

Some sources say that Malone was the first to invent and patent the pressing iron and comb. She created and sold products under the Wonderful Hair Grower name. Later on, Malone changed the company name to the Poro Company after a word from a west African language meaning devotional society. Malone was also the first African-American to have a hair and cosmetics company showcased at the World's Fair in St. Louis. One of her representatives for the fair was none other than Madam C.J. Walker. Malone moved her company factory to St. Louis and encouraged the expansion of her products to become renowned nationally and globally. Unfortunately her products were not under copyright, this allowed Madam C.J. Walker to develop her own creations under the Poro Company causing a rift between the two women and Walker later created her own company. Malone was one the first multimillionaire African-American Women with an estimated net worth of fourteen million dollars even though at her time of death her wealth went down to one hundred thousand her historical legacy still lives on today. In 1918, she created the Poro College for cosmetology and by 1930 the Poro Company had 75,000 representatives all over the world. Malone was known as a "freak giver" as she gave a multitude of her fortune to various African-American Organizations and to historic black colleges such as Howard University.

Resources:

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