Anne Weightman: One of the wealthiest women in the world

Anne Marie Weightman, born on Dec. 18, 1842, was the daughter of William Weightman and Louisa Stelwagon.

Anne had two brothers, William Jr. and John Farr. She was raised in lavish surroundings on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia and in Cape May, New Jersey. On April 8, 1862, when she was 19, Anne married Robert Jarvis Cochran Walker, a 23-year-old Harvard-trained lawyer and emerging politician.

Their son, William Weightman Walker, was born in Philadelphia in 1865.

Weightman years

The Walker family’s residence in Williamsport lasted less than 20 years, but the Weightman-Walkers left their mark. R. J. C. Walker is first listed in the city directory in 1877-78, a lawyer practicing in the Opera House. A few years later, he is listed as the president of the Lumberman’s National Bank, a position that Peter Herdic had held before him. Walker managed the former Herdic properties and was active politically. He was elected to the United States Congress from the district encompassing Williamsport in 1880. By 1898, the Walker’s address was 204 Walnut St. in Philadelphia, and J. Henry and Avis Cochran were living in the West Fourth Street house.

In a 1926 story, “Noted Women Directed Williamsport Society,” Col. Thomas L. Laidlaw describes the home and the Park Hotel as “scene[s] of a lavish hospitality the fame of which spread far and wide.” Anne reportedly hired train cars to bring guests to Williamsport and then to Niagara Falls. Anne went with her husband to Washington when he was in Congress; Laidlaw wrote, “she soon became a leader in the smart set.”

Their son, William, graduated from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, in chemistry and then earned a medical degree from Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia.

He was said to be a favorite of his grandfather William Weightman, and it is rumored that his grandfather gave him $4 million for his 21st birthday and told him to see the world.

He did travel the world, but then sadly, at the age of 26, he died of typhoid fever in Denver, Colorado, where he had gone to set up a medical practice.

Back to Philadelphia

After they moved back to Philadelphia, the Walkers maintained a suite at the Park Hotel, which Anne continued to own until the 1920s. The widowed Ennie Herdic also had a suite there for several years, until she died in 1911.

As late as 1911, Anne was the biggest property owner in Williamsport. The Gazette and Bulletin reported some charitable activity in Williamsport, but she does not seem to have been a member of any boards or charitable institutions. Her name does live on in the magnificent Weightman Building on West Fourth Street and in the Anne Weightman Trolley that today carries tourists through the streets of Williamsport.

One thing that generally is not known about Anne Weightman is that she was a very talented and shrewd businesswoman. R. J. C. Walker died in 1903, and Anne’s brothers, both partners in their father’s business, had died early deaths. So in 1904, Anne, the only surviving child, was admitted as a partner in her father’s drug company. In 1904, this was quite extraordinary for a woman — and a 62-year-old woman at that. By all reports she was very successful in running the large, complex company.

When 91-year-old Weightman died, another interesting story began.

Although each of his sons had left a widow and children, none of the grand- children were in the will. The entire estate of $60 million (what would be about $1.4 billion now) was left to Anne. Her sister-in-law, the socially prominent Sabine Josephine d’Uvilleirs Weightman, spent years in court trying to break the will.

Anne moved to New York City to avoid the fallout and, it was rumored, because she feared that she would be poisoned.