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# **Annie T. Malone**

## **Poro Products**

### **Annie Malone Children and Family Services Center**

**By M. Karen Hubbard**

Annie T. Malone was born on August 9, 1869, and she was the eleventh child of twelve in her family. She lived with her parents on a small farm in Illinois, but sadly, her parents died. Her older sister then cared for her, and they moved to Peoria, Illinois. She was also sick a lot, but her sister found a woman who knew about herbs to help Annie. Things were quite tough for little Annie early in her life, but that would change.

Ever since she was young, Annie was really interested in hair. She would braid her older sister's hair quite often. At the time, there were not many hair care options for African-American women, and Annie wanted to change that. She did well in chemistry class in high school, and she regularly worked with the herb woman to make potions and products for hair. Her creations often worked wonderfully, and her shampoos, lotions, and other items came to be known as Wonderful Hair Grower.

In 1899, Annie and her sister moved to Lovejoy, Illinois, where she started to sell her products. She went door to door to let all the women in town know about her products. Business was booming within a year. In 1902, she moved to Saint Louis because she was hoping to expand her business. Yet, she soon moved to the state of Mississippi. She did return to Saint Louis in time for the World's Fair though.

She contacted newspapers to announce her company would now be called the Poro Company. Poro is a West African word that means "physical and spiritual growth." Annie really wanted to help African-American women to change their lives. African-American woman that worked for Annie made more than they could in the other jobs available to them at the time. Some women paid to open salons stocked with Poro products. Annie had also opened the first Poro College in 1902 to train her saleswomen. They were trained in manicure, pedicure, massage, and hair weaving.

Annie's business was huge. Soon, there were stores in South America, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Philippines. Even with her success, she was still very generous. Her employees were very well off. She donated large amounts of money to charities and schools, and she even bought houses for relatives. Annie became the president of the Saint Louis Colored Orphans Home in 1919. Poro College was used as a relief center when a tornado hit Saint Louis in 1927.

Not all was well for Annie and her company though. She went through a difficult divorce, and she faced many lawsuits in the coming years. In 1930, she moved the business and college to Chicago, Illinois, but things did not improve for her. By 1951, the government had to take control of the Poro properties because of unpaid taxes.

Annie's life was still an amazing success. She is considered the first major African-American millionaire. At one point, she employed one hundred thousand people and had one hundred beauty stores. Her charities also made big differences in the lives of many people. She started from simple beginnings, but she grew to be a great and generous business woman.