'Genius With A Midas Touch'

By JOHN JASPER

They called her the "Genius with the Midas touch."

Everything Sara Spencer Washington touched didn't turn to gold.

Many people thought it did.

But the fact that she could write a check in seven figures, that she accumulated real property at one time estimated at $600,000, colored their thinking.

Energy

What led the public astray was her wealth rather than the tremendous energy that enabled her to begin work at 6:30 in the morning before most people are out of bed and carry on until long after midnight.

They knew that she purchased the gigantic Brigantine Hotel for $22,000 and sold it for $150,000.

She purchased $75,000 U. S. bonds.

She built a handsome $85,000 building on Broad street in Philadelphia.

She bought supplies for her factory in carload lots.

Mink And Cadillac

She bought two $3,000 mink coats and a Persian Lamb and traveled around the country in a $7,000 Imperial Cadillac.

She gave lavish parties at Easter and on Labor Day.

She owned at one time, Apex buildings in twelve cities.

Banned from local golf courses years ago, she turned her farm into a 9-hole golf and country club.

They saw her make gifts to charity or needy families.

They saw her confer with national figures. New Jersey's Governor Driscoll came to ask her help in his primary election.

Father Divine and the late Finley Wilson were her good friends.

She was named on commissions and appointed delegate to important conventions.

Grandmother

They saw her adopt a child, raise and educate it, saw it marry and bring Mrs. Washington two grandchildren. They saw her wed to a second husband in 1944.

They saw her buy shoes 6 to 10 pairs at a time.

They noted that no matter what she bought she paid cash, whether it was a $40,000 Apex warehouse, a $25,000 Apex auditorium, a $20,000 Apex laboratory, a $50,000 Apex Rest (tourist place), Ellen Memorial Center for girls $18,000, Apex drugstore and 6 apartments $21,000.

No Mortgages

She never took a mortgage. She said: "If I can't buy without a mortgage, I'll never buy."

People never saw her with a brief case no matter what she bought.

If it was a building, she carried the price, the dimensions, the names of owners, the list of liens in her head.

SHE OVERCAME

A lack of education,
A plain face and figure,
A Struggle with poverty,
Men who Scoffed.

What The Public Didn't Know

What the public didn't know was that she never carried more than $20 in her pocketbook.

When she found a hat she liked she left dozens of others in her closet and wore it out.

She liked most plain clothes and scuffed shoes.

She hated dirt and disorder.

As soon as a house party was over, even at 2 a.m., the cleaning up began.

"I don't want to come down and see this in the morning," she said.

Finley Wilson

She was grateful to the late Finley Wilson, Elk leader.

She attended Norfolk (Va.) Mission College when a girl, walked seven miles a day to get there. She crossed a stream in a row boat and when it leaked she bailed the water out.

Finley gave her her first job in his Norfolk printing office.

She never thought he would succeed in life.

He thought the same about her. They both were wrong.

Dr. Charlotte Brown

She admired Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown of Sedalia, N.C., who had the educational opportunities she missed.

She phoned Dr. Brown for advice on speeches. She sent her daughter to Dr. Brown's Sedalia school.

Her Mother

Sara Spencer and her mother moved from Virginia to Pittsburgh and later to Atlantic City because Mother Spencer needed the salt air for her health.

In Atlantic City, her mother worked as a domestic

As a young girl, Sara at 18 or 19 made bags of beads and sold them to her mother's wealthy employers and their friends.

She also learned hair dressing and one day discovered that a mixture of petroleum jelly and oil made course hair smooth.

She bought these ingredients at the corner drugstore.

One day she ran out of them and couldn't finish work on a customer.

A little peeved, the customer suggested that Sara look on the labels of the jelly and oil, buy the original ingredients and mix them herself.

The Beginning

That was the beginning of a fortune.

She experimented with her own hair and ruined it.

But her formulas worked out.

Soon she was mixing pomades in a wash tub by hand.

It was a slow and tedious process.

After a day's work her fingers were cramped and her hand closed so she couldn't open it for hours.

Men Turned Her Down

She needed capital. But big men of the town turned her down.

"Imagine an unattractive girl with a poor figure in the beauty business," they said.

She remembered this in after years when they came to her for a loan. She did some "refusing."

She peddled her pomades from door to door. There were many rebuffs.

One day she was ready to quit and go look for a job.

The night before she had cried herself to sleep.

She looked at her dirty front room. "At least," she said to herself, "I can sweep this floor."

She began sweeping and everywhere her broom touched, she saw sunbeams coming from the floor.

The sun had indeed come out.

MRS. SARA SPENCER WASHINGTON

She regarded it as an omen and decided to stick to her business.

The First Apex

She saw a frame building across the street and the sun shone in that too.

A customer came in an offered to sell it at any price.

Her mother's employer, a lawyer, put through the deal for her.

It later became a two-story beauty factory and later 1½ stories and wings were added.

Today it is the $50,000 Apex building and Washington residence.

Up Before Daybreak

For years, Sara Washington was up before day and at work.

She got her Ford roadster out of the garage, dusted it off herself, and drove downtown to make household purchases.

At the post office, she stopped to pick up from her box a huge bag of mail.

Back home it was sorted and money was counted and ready for the bank.

There were orders from agents, inquiries about her schools in 12 cities, applications from those who wanted to establish beauty shops, letters asking alms or contributions, invitations to fill speaking engagements.

By the time her office opened, the mail was ready for her secretaries.

Breakfast At 10

At 10 a.m., she was ready for breakfast. Afterward she carried her day's receipts to the bank.

Many nights her lights burned until 2 a.m. She learned to do with 5 hours sleep.

Her farmer brought in one day the $3,000 receipts for the year.

They counted them together. It took three hours.

Mrs. Washington moistened her finger each time she counted out the one dollar bills.

She counted only as fast as the farmer could follow her.

Genius

They call me "genius with the Midas touch," she snorted.

"They never knew the poverty, the long hours, the handicap of poor schooling, the struggle to find a hair pomade and then to sell it.

"A plain girl with little education can have a tough time in this world. I know."

(To Be Concluded)

Mrs. Washington at dinner with President and Mrs. Eli Lescot of Haiti in 1940.

Norfolk – Virginia's Door To World Trade

Norfolk, Va., is a growing industrial and seaport city—proud of its growth and boasting of its bright future.

In the 1950 census, the city was given a population of 213,513. Already they claim 233,000; and with annexing, Norfolk plans to reach the 350,000 mark.

The closely related Norfolk-Newport News-Portsmouth tricity population is nearly 600,000. Norfolk calls itself the center of a 16-county North Carolina and 16-county Virginia area with a population of more than a million.

With this wealth in human resources, the city has used its natural position on Hampton Roads and Chesapeake Bay to develop into an industrial center with more than 300 plants and a ship arrival and departure figure of 7,000 each way.

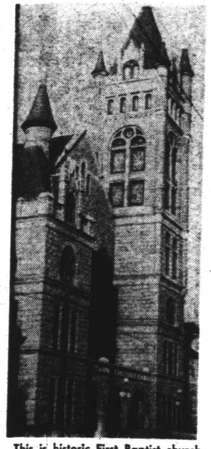
The future is bright, Norfolk will play an increasingly important part in America's position in world affairs.

It will figure in trade expansion and military preparedness.

The Norfolk Navy Base is a great facility of the U.S. Navy, and the Norfolk Navy Yard, located across the Elizabeth River, has a peak employment potential of 40,000.

Public Housing Sped

A massive home-building program is under way. A total of $45 million will be spent in the next few years and four projects, three with 916 units for colored people were begun in 1951.



This is historic First Baptist church, Bute Street, Norfolk. The Rev. Richard A. Bowling is pastor.

Norfolk's Booker T. Washington high school choir, directed by Sherman Greene, is preparing for the Virginia State Music Festival to be held in Petersburg, April 11.

A 752-unit slum clearance project broke ground in 1952.

This preferred position of building for colored citizens is more a recognition of neglect in the past, than of promise for the future. The more than 60,000 citizens of color in this sprawling seaport live a double life of honorable contribution and labor to the upbuilding of a community which is theirs only in a limited sense.

They are a part, inasmuch as their lives are interwoven by day with its heartbeat of its river traffic and highway development, the key to the future, but by night they are rejected and disowned.

Norfolk has made undeniable progress. Few southern cities can point to greater developments by minds and labors of colored citizens than this seaside port.

A great hospital, a college development given birth in the past few years are here.

Yet the life blood of colored Norfolk flows through the veins of the massive shipping and manufacturing interests.

Active Politically

Norfolk's colored voters are active in political affairs but there are no colored members on the ruling commission. The police force has eight men and two women. In addition 15 women serve in the traffic division.

The medical profession includes 16 doctors and 6 dentists.

Booker T. Washington High in Norfolk is a leading Virginia public school in all phases of education.

Winston Douglas is principal. There are 84 teachers on the staff. Edward A. Rogers is assistant principal.

The school has 56 classrooms, auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, a printing shop which opened this year, of which L. A. Austin is instructor; art class, auto mechanics, electricity, plumbing, and metal work.

The enrollment for the 1952-1953 term is 1,886.

The school is famous for its 125-member band, which has paraded in Canada and took part in the inaugural parade for President Eisenhower.

A Booker T. student, Miss Merle Mitchell, recently won a $100 Westinghouse science scholarship.

Teachers at Booker T. received their training at Lincoln, Columbia, Fisk, Hampton, Virginia State, University of Pennsylvania, Howard, Tuskegee, Boston University, West Virginia State, Ohio State, Cornell, University of Michigan, New York university, Knoxville, Virginia Union university, Shaw, and J. C. Smith.

14 Other Schools

Fourteen elementary junior high schools round out the public school facilities for the city's 10,000 students.

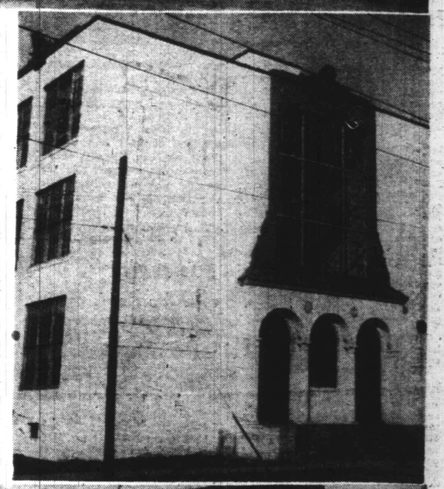
There is one Catholic School, St. Joseph.

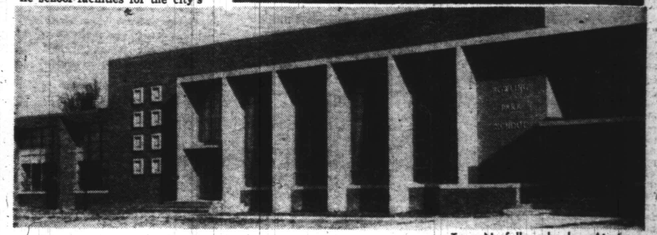
One of the most recently constructed elementary schools is the Bowling Park School, located at the new Bowling Park housing development.

Among public housing units are the massive 900-unit Liberty Park, built early in World War II, the 230-unit Carney Park, 338 unit Roberts Park, 242-unit Oak Leaf Park and the newer 350-unit Bowling Park.

Some 180 new units have been added to Roberts. Other units include Morton Park, Diggs Park and Young Park.

Historic First Baptist church on Bute st., is pictured here. Bank St. Baptist, another leading church, will celebrate its 120th anniversary this May. The Rev. J. B. Henderson is pastor.





Two Norfolk schools. At top, Booker T. Washington high school below, the new Bowling Park school, situated in Bowling Park housing development.

Wendell T. Brown (center), recently promoted to vice-president of Va. Mutual Insurance, is congratulated by family and friends. Left, Earl Wright, Mrs. R. C. Butler, Mr. Brown, Wendell, Jr., Mrs. Brown, and Miss Corrine Ransome.