

From Hamilton, Missouri

James Cash Penney, an American businessman—born in Missouri.

James Cash Penney, Jr. (September 16, 1875 – February 12, 1971) was an American businessman and entrepreneur who, in 1902, founded the J.C. Penney stores.

J.C. Penney was born on a farm outside of Hamilton, Caldwell County, Missouri to James Cash Penney, Sr. and Mary Frances (nee Paxton) Penney. He was the seventh of twelve children, only six of whom lived to adulthood. Penney's father was a Baptist preacher and farmer whose strict discipline included making his son pay for his own clothing once he reached his late pre-teens. His intentions after graduation from Hamilton High School were to attend college with the hopes of becoming a lawyer. However, his father's untimely death forced a change in plans, with Penney taking a job as a store clerk to help support the family. Penney's health problems caused him to venture west to Colorado in his early twenties, where he found employment with the previously mentioned Golden Rule stores.

James Cash Penney married three times in his life. First wife Bertha Alva Hess died of pneumonia, second wife Mary Hortense Kimball also died of unspecified medical issues in 1924. Finally Penney found lasting love with third wife Caroline Marie Autenrieth, to whom he was married forty-five years until his death. By his first wife he had two sons, Roswell Penney and James C. Penney III. By his second wife he had another son, Kimball Penney. And by his third wife, he had two daughters, Mary Frances Penney and Carol Penney.

After the 1929 stock crash, Penney lost virtually all his personal wealth, and borrowed against his life insurance policies to help the company meet its payroll. The financial setbacks took a toll on his health. Penney checked himself into the Battle Creek Sanitarium, where he was treated. After hearing the hymn “God Will Take Care of You” (written by Civilla Durfee Martin) being sung a service in the hospital’s chapel, Penney became a born-again Christian. Even after relinquishing daily operating management of the company Penney continued his active involvement in managing the company and its stores. In 1940, during a visit to a store in Des Moines, Iowa, he trained a young Sam Walton on how to wrap packages with a minimal amount of ribbon. He remained as chairman of the board until 1946 and after that as honorary chairman until his death in 1971. The Reverend Dr. Norman Vincent Peale delivered the eulogy at Penneys’ funeral. Penney was buried in the Bronx

section of New York City. His grave, at the Woodlawn Cemetery, is not far from that of fellow retail entrepreneur, F.W. Woolworth.

Commemorations

- The J.C. Penney Conference Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis was dedicated in his honor on January 23, 1972. The building was made possible through financial donations by Mr. Penney and his company.
- Mr. Penney was inducted into the Junior Achievement U.S. Business Hall of Fame in 1976.
- The J. C. Penney Historic District in Kemmerer, Wyoming was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1978.
- In 1994, Penney was inducted into the Hall of Famous Missourians, and a bronze bust depicting him is on permanent display in the rotunda of the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City.
- Hamilton High School in Hamilton, Missouri was renamed Penney High School.

“I believe a man is better anchored who has a belief in the Supreme Being.”

J. C. Penney

Luck is always the last refuge of laziness and incompetence.