

# MARGARET CARNEGIE... THE WOMAN BEHIND THE MAN BEHIND THE MILLIONS

*Andrew Carnegie's mother was a remarkable woman who had a profound influence on her son's extraordinary life. This is her story...*

Margaret had high hopes for her sons and was fiercely proud. When a family member suggested that the young Andrew contribute to the family coffers by peddling 'knick-knacks', she flew into a rage, crying,

*'What – my son a pedlar and go among rough men upon the wharves! I would rather throw him into the Allegheny River!'*



Margaret Carnegie, and inset Thomas with Andrew

In December, 1834, Margaret married William Carnegie, a weaver, who, like her father, had an avid interest in politics. William was widely respected as an intelligent and religious man but he was not, in his son's view, 'for the world' and was not a natural businessman. The couple had three children; Andrew, Anne and Thomas. Sadly Anne died before she was two.

The Carnegies seem to have had a very 'child-centred' approach to family life – unusual for the time – and set great store on the value of self-improvement and education. Margaret believed a good home life was vital to set her sons on the right path.

William's income as a hand-loom weaver was drastically reduced following the introduction of the steam loom. At this point, Margaret, who throughout her life demonstrated a remarkable combination of grit and initiative, opened a small grocer's shop in their home. She further boosted the family income by cobbling shoes, a skill she had learned in her youth from her father. She was determined her sons would always be 'trimly dressed'.

Andrew Carnegie's mother, Margaret Morrison, was born in Dunfermline on 19 June, 1810. Her father was Thomas Morrison, a 'born orator', who was an active participant in local politics. Her mother, Ann Hodge, was an educated lady from Edinburgh, who died while her eight children were still young. When Margaret, the second oldest of the family, was born, Thomas was 'in good circumstances', running a leather tanning business. However, after Waterloo, his business suffered and the family experienced hard times.



Andrew Carnegie

As trade grew worse for the hand-loom weavers, Margaret wrote to her two sisters, Annie and Kittie, who were living in Pittsburgh, USA. She told them that the Carnegies were considering emigrating 'for the sake of their young sons'. Her sisters wrote back encouraging the plan.

William was not keen, hoping instead that he could turn his fortunes around at home. Margaret, however, seems to have been determined that this was the right thing to do. The loom was sold to fund the passage to America but the price it achieved was disappointing and the family was left £20 short of the cost of the passage.

One of Margaret's friends, Ailie Ferguson, stepped in to lend the necessary funds. Margaret was 37 when she left for America. Her husband was 10 years older. Andrew was 12 and Tom four. One can only imagine the trepidation this tiny woman felt as she set sail for the unknown with her precious sons in her charge.

The Carnegies settled in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, in two rooms above a weaver's shop. William began weaving tablecloths which he then had to sell door to door. The returns were meagre. Again Margaret used the skills learnt from her father and, in addition to looking after her children and home, earned \$4 a week making shoes. She often worked well into the night to keep the family's heads above water.

William died not long after the family settled in America. His early death made Margaret and Andrew, already close, even more dependent on each other. Around this time, Andrew, who was progressing rapidly in his career, had the opportunity to make a \$500 investment in the Adams Express Company. The family had just managed, through hard work and careful housekeeping, to purchase their home. When the investment opportunity was put to Margaret, she was prepared to pledge the house as security for a loan so that the shares could be bought. She had a brother in East Liverpool who ran a farmers' bank. Margaret set out by steamer the next morning to visit him, and secured the money. As Adams Express was the company later to become known as American Express, Margaret's efforts were well justified.

Margaret's life from this time became easier with servants being appointed to help with the running of the household. In June, 1862 the family was able to visit Scotland and Margaret was very moved to be on native soil once more. She visited again in 1881 when she laid the foundation stone for the Carnegie Library in Dunfermline.

Margaret died in November, 1886. She had, like both of her sons, contracted typhoid fever. Andrew recovered but his brother, Tom, died within a few days of their mother. Margaret was 76 years old, Tom was 43. It was not until after this event

that Andrew, who was by then 51 years old, married. Andrew Carnegie and Louise Whitfield had been engaged three times and it seems Margaret may have had something to do with the breaking of the two previous engagements. In contrast to Andrew's glowing references



Louise (Whitfield) Carnegie

to his mother, Louise Carnegie said that Margaret was 'the most unpleasant woman she had met in her life!' However, when Louise gave birth to the couple's only child, a daughter, she was named Margaret in honour of Andrew's much-loved and revered mother.

Andrew Carnegie's mother was an exceptional woman; thrifty and practical, well-read and intelligent. Her high standards, drive and unstinting support undoubtedly had a profound influence on her son and his extraordinary achievements.