

**Childhood and Adolescence:**

She was born on a farm in Quiebrahacha, Mariel, by then Pinar del Río province, on July 22nd, 1846. She was the daughter of Amelaide Dolley, a descendant of French immigrants from Jamaica and of Hilario Peñarredonda Ortiz, Spanish, a native of Santander and captain of militias (who was the son of José Peñarredonda, commander of one of the ships that took part in the battle of Trafalgar). The family also resides in the nearby city of Artemisa.

Thanks to her mother's spirit of rebellion and the liberal education that she gave her children, Magdalena Peñarredonda developed an early attachment to Cuban traditions and a determined and rebellious character that, after maturing, turned into patriotism and a spirit of sacrifice to independence favor. The journalist and writer Herminiadel Portal testifies about her early attitude of justice in Bohemia magazine, when she describes the episode in Magdalena's family home in which the girl collaborates to facilitate the escape of a prisoner from her father.

Other testimonies assure that Magdalena, her sisters and her mother, cut their hair as a sign of solidarity with the "Camagüeyanas" women (women born in Camagüey province) and as a sign of disagreement over the execution of the patriot Joaquín de Agüero. On several occasions Magdalena and her brothers risked their lives to collaborate with the pro-independence conspirators, who on many occasions managed to escape from police raids thanks to the children of Captain Peñarredonda.

**Early independence activity.**

Married at 15 years of age with the merchant José Cobielles, a native of Asturias, he turned his house in Havana into a recognized center of literary and political gatherings attended by renowned figures of Havana and Cuban culture and intellectuality as Enrique José Varona, Alfredo Zayas, José María Gálvez, Manuel Sanguily, Julián del Casal,

and José Antonio Fernández de Castro. These meetings also served as moments of revolutionary conspiracy against the Spanish authorities.

A fact that profoundly marked Magdalena's life was the murder of her brother Federico, on December 24th, 1884, at only 29 years of age and who had already stood out for his ideas and revolutionary pronouncements against Spanish colonial rule. In 1888, she is processed for the first time for her political activities, in this case, for the publication of articles in the newspaper "El Criollo". Due to cause 294, that is followed by political rebellion, she is forced to leave to the United States.

There she meets several patriots, including José Martí, who knows her prolific conspiracy, immediately sympathizes with her and recognizes her with his gift of a volume of "Versos Sencillos" (Simple Verses), in his dedication he writes: "To Mrs. Magdalena Peñarredonda, a model of patience and patriotism. Your respectful friend, José Martí."

### **In the war of independence from 1895-1898.**

In 1893, Magdalena Peñarredonda is recognized in Cuba and in New York as the center of important conspiracy nuclei. At the beginning of the War of 95s, and due to her prestige, she was appointed Delegate of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) in Pinar del Río, the only woman in Cuba who held such an important responsibility.

From 1895, back in Cuba, she operates constantly between Pinar del Río, Artemisa (then headquarters of the Spanish troops in the Mariel-Majana Trocha) and Havana. The delegate knew very well how to take advantage of all favorable circumstances to carry out her important and risky work, using as a pretext the visits to her relatives in Artemisa. She crosses the "Trocha" (military line) on numerous occasions, carrying correspondence for General Antonio Maceo; she occasionally confronted verbally General Arolas, the highest authority of said military line. Her leadership and loyalty make her the most skilled and able figure of the Revolution in the West, capable of coordinating actions aimed at supporting the Liberating Army.

She was one of the few people who Lieutenant General Antonio Maceo contacted to coordinate his entry and exit from Pinar del Río in February and March 1896. In this period of the war and during the Pinar del Río Campaign, this brave Woman was the main link with Maceo. He more than once praises her help and thanks her for her valuable services.

After Maceo's fall in combat in December 1896, Magdalena Peñarredonda continued as a collaborator of Major General Juan Rius Rivera and

later of Major General Pedro Díaz Molina (commander of the sixth corps of the Cuban army). She had an extensive epistolary relationship with Tomás Estrada Palma, PRC Delegate, after Jose Martí's fall in combat, as well as with other chiefs of the western "mambisado" (fighters against Spain), such as: Emilio Laurent, Pedro Delgado, Mayía Rodríguez and Alberto Nodarse.

When the National Patriotic Board, chaired by General José Rogelio del Castillo, was founded on October 12th, 1897, she was the only female figure that was part of its board of directors.

Despite the persecution to which she remained subjected and with the exception of missions that she carried out outside this territory, she did not leave the Havana-Pinar del Río area during the war. She was a faithful chronicler of the crimes of reconcentration and publicly denounced Valeriano Weyler's criminal policy of reconcentration.

Given to the intensity of her revolutionary work, she is again processed "for helping the rebels" and enters the National Prison in Havana on April 4th, 1898, where she remains until October 1st of the same year. In that period, she became a leader and defender of the rights of prisoner women and, as such, was constantly required by the prison authorities. Despite the difficult prison conditions, she refuses to be released through the charitable work of the Spanish officers' wives. She was staunch opponent of the North American intervention in 1898 and openly denounced the ambitions of the circles of power of the United States with respect to Cuba. From the Artemiseña and Havana press, she opposed the Platt Amendment. At the end of the war, she was promoted to the rank of Commander of the Cuban Liberation Army, the highest military rank attained by a woman.

### **In the Republic (1902-1937).**

From 1901, she turned her job as a journalist into a militant stage. In her articles in "El Jordán Patriótico", she lashes out at the "new Weylerian political parties" that prospered at the expense of a people that saw their dreams of independence and sovereignty frustrated. She criticizes those who enrich themselves in the Republic through the political career and who never fought against Spain for independence. Her revolutionary militancy makes her the most renowned and controversial female journalist, not only in Artemisa's press but also in the country's capital.

She opposes the second American intervention in 1906, the massacre of the Black Independents in 1912 and Gerardo Machado's dictatorship. This is evidenced by her articles "Morbid Epidemic" and "Real Bursts", denouncing the corruption, economic penetration and political

dominance of the United States over the island. In the 1920s, despite her advanced age, she supported the revolution against Machado. The youth of the José Martí Popular University found support in her home and spirit, the intellectuals of the Cuban Action Falange, the Minority Group, the fighters of the Veterans and Patriots Movement, the women who organized their first national congress in 1923, as well as leaders of labor unions.

She died in Artemisa on September 6th, 1937, at 91 years of age. Owner of the valuable garments that symbolize the fighting spirit of the Sixth Liberating Army Corps in “Vuelta Abajo” (refers to Pinar del Rio province), and that were granted to her for her valuable services given to the Revolution: a piece of the T-shirt with which the Bronze Titan was buried and a wooden fragment belonging to the boat in which Maceo crossed the bay of Mariel circumventing the Mariel Line to Majana.

In her memory a bust rises in the Central Park of Artemisa.