



Gaslight News

The Historical Society of Riverton
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"Classic Broadway with a Twist" Program at May Meeting

The Historical Society of Riverton will meet on Monday May 10th, 2004 at 7:30 pm for a general meeting and program at the Porch Club located at Fourth and Howard Streets.

The program for the evening features a sing-along with Nina Deutsch on piano with many of your favorite Broadway show tunes.

Ms. Deutsch is a pianist, singer and speaker. She is a graduate of the Julliard School and Yale University where she studied piano with Rudolf Firkusny and Rosina Lhevinne. Nina has appeared as a musical soloist at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and programs at the United Nations as well as Wigmore Hall in London, Harvard, Yale and other colleges in the United States.

Nina has appeared on NBC and CBS television and had extensive tours in Europe, Canada and The People's Republic of China. She has studied the Ives Collection with John Kirkpatrick and is considered an authority and interpreter of Ives' works. Her repertoire ranges from Bach to Jazz and modern popular music. Nina is listed in the *Who's Who of America* and *Who's Who in the World*.

Our program, "Classic Broadway with a Twist" features the music and personalities of the great Broadway composers including George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin and Leonard Bernstein. Nina brings to life the music and character of each composer. For this program count on relishing your classic favorites like West Side Story, The Sound of Music and many others.

**The May 10th meeting will be held at the
Porch Club on Fourth and Howard
Streets at 7:30pm**

HSR Display at the Garden Tour

Get ready to throw some rice -- the Historical Society of Riverton (HSR) will sponsor an extravagant display at the Porch Club's Garden Tour on Saturday, June 5.

"Here Comes the Bride: 100+ Years of Wedding Fashions" is an inclusive presentation of antique wedding fashions representing each decade from the 1860's through the 1960's. The display features collections from our archives including dresses, tuxedos, marriage certificates, and accessories such as fans, gloves, and shoes.

"Here Comes the Bride" is located in the small building behind the New Leaf gift shop. All proceeds from the Garden Tour benefit the Porch Club's service activities. Tickets may be purchased at the New Leaf or for more information call Pat Brunker at 856-303-1777.

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The *Historical Society of Riverton* hosted a program on **Resort Architecture** at the last general meeting on March 8.

Dr. Kevin Murphy presented a slide program on the resort architecture built since the mid-nineteenth century in New Jersey. Dr. Murphy's talk also highlighted the distinctive resort architecture at the Jersey Shore, from the late nineteenth century hotels and houses at Cape May to the postwar motels of Wildwood, which earned that town the name "Little Las Vegas".

Our March general meeting program on resort architecture was made possible through a generous grant from the Horizons Speakers Bureau of the *New Jersey Council for the Humanities*, a state partner of the *National Endowment for the Humanities*.

We appreciate the hard work of our **Program Chairman John Farr** in producing a fascinating speakers series throughout the last year.

Antique Clothing Archives

Many thanks to both Nancy Hall and Betty Graham who recently donated items to the Historical Society of Riverton's Clothing Archives.

Nancy Hall donated a beautiful blue child's dress and an embroidered petticoat to the Historical Society's archive collection.

Betty Graham gave us a ladies' dress and a wedding ensemble. All of the items are beautifully handmade and seem to date from the late 1800's.

Thanks also to Charlotte Lippincott who donated a t-shirt from Riverton's 90th Fourth of July celebration. It will be an antique some day.

They will all be on display at the May meeting so please stop and take a look at them.

Pat Brunker, Vice President

Attention Riverton Brides!

If you would like to loan the HSR a wedding item or photo for "*Here Comes the Bride*"

please call Priscilla Taylor, at 786-3555. We'd love to feature a gallery of Riverton brides and grooms in our Garden Tour display.

Be A Bridesmaid or Groomsman for a Day!

We're looking for a few volunteers who can help staff our display during the Garden Tour on June 5 from 10AM-4PM. If you have an hour or two to spare and would enjoy talking to the public, please call Priscilla Taylor, 786-3555. Volunteers can attend the outdoor tented wedding reception for free!

Refreshments courtesy of the New Leaf Tea Room

Then and Now...

"Beauty Knows No Color"

Helen Williams was already recognized as a talented artist with a keen eye for still life and landscapes when she graduated from Palmyra High School in 1954. Helen was the daughter of an East Riverton couple and raised to believe she could overcome any obstacle in life to realize her dreams. In high school she was given the nickname "*Eartha Kitt*" for possessing the striking good looks and charisma of a Hollywood star. Years later Barbara Summers of *Essence* magazine was quoted in her book *Pioneers of Beauty*,

"Helen Williams' cool edged glamour suggest a modern Nefertitti... the first brown skinned model to achieve national prominence"

In a recent interview for the *Gaslight News* Helen Williams shared some of her early memories of life in and around Riverton and of her successful career in fashion. Helen's fiftieth high school reunion this year coincides with the 50th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court ruling banning school segregation- *Brown vs Board of Education*. It is an apt reminder of the civil rights struggle and the sacrifices made by many to overcome segregation in America. Helen Williams is a trailblazer whose talent and perseverance opened doors once closed to African-American women in the field of fashion in the United States.

Helen attended a segregated elementary school in Cinnaaminson in the 1940s known as the Parry School. Segregation in New Jersey was outlawed after World War II, under the New Jersey Constitution of 1947. After high school Helen moved to Montclair, New Jersey and worked as a photographic stylist at Pagano Studios in New York City.



Helen Williams was quickly discovered as a fashion model through a series of test shots taken by French photographer Eric Neppo. She was later supervised and advised by Ophelia DeVore and she signed with the Grace De Marco Modeling Agency.

The 1950s were turbulent times in the United States and life wasn't always fair to people of color pursuing their chosen professions. While she appeared in leading African-American magazines her opportunities to appear in mainstream publications were limited. Helen's images appeared in *Jet Magazine* on December 6th, 1956 in an article "*How to Become an Ad Model*" which foretold her success in the fashion industry. She also appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in June of 1958. Helen was featured on the cover of *Ebony* in January 1959 and in their 30th year anniversary issue.

The Famed 'Helen of Paris' Star of Charities Benefit Show

Newspaper headline from

The Philadelphia Tribune
Saturday September 12, 1964

East Riverton to Paris and the Cannes Film Festival

Helen was a popular model but found opportunities limited in the American fashion scene. In 1960 Helen Williams decided to work for the famous fashion house of Jean Desses and Christin Dior in Paris. Helen related that, "After working in Paris I gained recognition in America." She was soon in demand and featured in fashion shows, newsreels and in print and television advertisements throughout Europe and the United States. Helen's rare combination of beauty and grace earned her a high-profile assignment at the 1960 *Cannes Film Festival* in France with Lajeune Hundley, the African-American model who was crowned Miss Festival at Cannes that year.

Johnson Publications reported in a December 1960 article "*the 23 year old Helen Williams in four years became the most photographed Negro model.*"

Stage and Screen Credits

As Helen gained acceptance in the United States she signed a contract with Baltea Films to interpret the role of Jenny Bell and co-starred with Calvin Lockhart in the romantic drama "*Venere Creola*" filmed in Haiti in the early 1960s. Helen Williams also appeared on stage in New York with the Cosmos Players in a 1964 production of the Langston Hughes play "*Simple Speaks His Mind*". Hughes wrote his prose fiction in 1950 and set it in the Harlem of the 1940's with a series of conversations between the professional narrator and the amusing character named Simple. Simple offers his candid perspectives on the issues of the day from civil rights to war to marriage.

While working on a fashion assignment Helen Williams was escorted by a male model, Norm Jackson, who worked for *B. Altman & Company* and *Saks Fifth Avenue* in New York. A chance meeting with Norm some time later blossomed in marriage and their return to Burlington County in 1977.

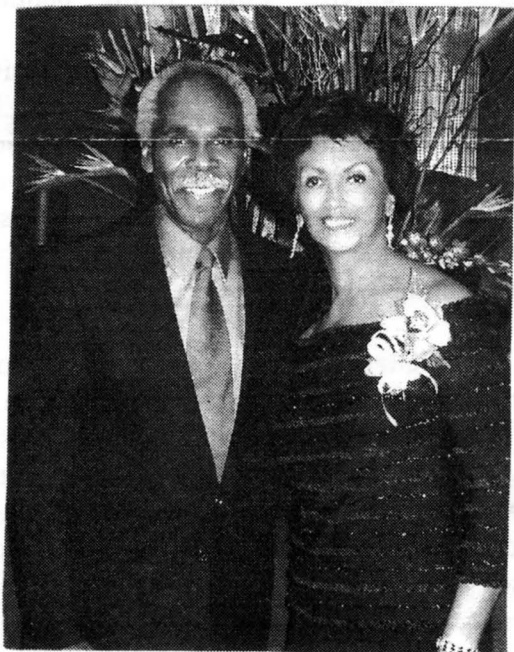
Today Norm and Helen live in Riverton, New Jersey where they are active in the community and they are avid gardeners. Their house was featured in the 1998 Riverton Porch Club Garden Tour.

On February 6th, 2004 Helen Jackson was honored by the *Fashion Institute of Technology* with the *Fashion and Arts Xchange's Trailblazer Award* for her contributions to the field of fashion in both Europe and the United States. Helen is still active in the fashion world through her twenty years association as a partner with Henry Castro in the firm H&H Fashion. Helen is a freelance fashion consultant and stylist who partners with Henry, a professional photographer, for still life fashion catalog layouts for all figure merchandise.

From time to time Helen is reminded of her extraordinary accomplishments when she looks at her photograph on the cover of Duke Ellington's jazz album "*Bal Masque*" on Columbia Records or at the Jantzen swimwear ad in the February 1966 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

In her spare time Helen continues her work as a successful oil painting artist and donates her time and artwork to a local group in Vermont.

You can learn more about her inspiring story by visiting a display about the life of Helen Williams at the Riverton Free Library or on the internet at <http://www.riverton.library.burlco.org>



Norman Jackson and Helen Williams