

## Catch a Glimpse Into Newport's Past at the "Gilded Age Newport in Color" Exhibit

The new exhibit opening at Rosecliff shares the history of Newport's African heritage families in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

March 12, 2024

by [Lauren Clem](https://www.rimonthly.com/bios/lauren-clem/) (<https://www.rimonthly.com/bios/lauren-clem/>)



(<https://www.rimonthly.com/content/uploads/2024/03/c/m/kids-2.jpg>)

This image from the Stokes Family Collection shows the Barclay family children photographed at Easton's Beach Studio c. 1913.

Ever wonder what it was like to live among Newport's costly mansions and cobblestone streets during the city's most extravagant era?

The “Gilded Age Newport in Color” exhibit does exactly that, telling the story of Newport’s African heritage residents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through photographs, news clippings, clothing, furniture and other home items from the collections of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, the Preservation Society of Newport County and other organizations.

Learn about Lillian Susie Fitts Jeter, a writer who contributed to *Ladies Home Journal*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall’s Magazine*, among other publications. Or imagine the dulcet tones of Abbie Mitchell, a soprano opera singer who premiered the role of Clara in *Porgy and Bess* and made an appearance at Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt’s Newport Theatre Party in 1902. The exhibit recounts the lives and accomplishments of Newport’s earliest African heritage doctors, dentists, teachers, hospitality entrepreneurs and elected officials, all of whom were involved in the city’s life during the Gilded Age.

“The ‘Gilded Age Newport in Color’ exhibition explores an important chapter in American history when African heritage families could unite and promote their economic and social well-being through self-reliance, entrepreneurship, political advancement and cultural interchange,” says Theresa “Soni” Guzmán Stokes, executive director of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society.

“Rhode Island’s Black Heritage Society has drawn from its over 9,000 linear feet of collections representing an African heritage experience that dramatically marks African heritage excellence. As best described by Booker T. Washington, America’s leading civil rights advocate of the Gilded Age, ‘Success always leaves footprints.’”

The exhibit opens at Rosecliff on March 15. Access to the more than 150 objects is included with admission to the mansion.

“We are proud to continue telling stories of the Gilded Age from different perspectives that give us a broader understanding of Newport during this important era,” says Trudy Coxe, chief executive officer of the Preservation Society of Newport County.

Last year, *Rhode Island Monthly* spoke with Keith Stokes — a historian, consultant and husband of Guzmán Stokes — for a [story about Newport’s African heritage community \(https://www.rimonthly.com/beyond-the-mansions/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/beyond-the-mansions/) in the June 2023 issue of the magazine. The couple traces their family history to prominent members of the Gilded Age community, many of whom are now featured in the Rosecliff exhibit. These include individuals like the Rev. Mahlon Van Horne, the first African heritage person to serve in the Rhode Island General Assembly, or his son, who worked as a dentist and founded the Newport branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Other residents made contributions in the fields of science, business and medicine. Mary H. Dickerson, a member of several women’s groups, owned a dressmaking shop on Bellevue Avenue and counted the city’s wealthy summer residents among her clients. Dr. Marcus F. Wheatland founded his practice in 1895 and was one of the first Newport doctors to use the x-ray machine. Dr. Harriet A. Rice studied medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School and the Women’s Medical College of New York but was forced to work abroad during World War I due to her gender and race.

Learn the details behind these and other stories at the “Gilded Age Newport in Color” exhibit through June 30. To learn more about the exhibit or purchase tickets, visit [newportmansions.org \(https://www.newportmansions.org/\)](https://www.newportmansions.org/).



(<https://www.rimonthly.com/content/uploads/2024/03/b/r/bellevue-block-gallery4-wall2-scaled.jpg>)

This photo from the Newport Historical Society Collection shows the George T. Downing block, named for local hotel owner George T. Downing, c. 1905.

## RELATED ARTICLES

[Beyond the Mansions \(https://www.rimonthly.com/beyond-the-mansions/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/beyond-the-mansions/)

[Inside the Real Gilded Age of Newport \(https://www.rimonthly.com/real-gilded-age-newport/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/real-gilded-age-newport/)

[“A Matter of Truth” Dives Into Rhode Island’s History of Discrimination \(https://www.rimonthly.com/a-matter-of-truth-exhibit/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/a-matter-of-truth-exhibit/)

Tags: [Black history \(https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/black-history/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/black-history/), [Newport \(https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/newport/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/newport/), [newport mansions \(https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/newport-mansions/\)](https://www.rimonthly.com/tag/newport-mansions/)

### NEWSLETTERS

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/newsletter-sign-up/>)

### SUBSCRIBE

(<https://ezsubscription.com/rim/subscribe>)

### Sections

Magazine

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/magazine/>)

Culture

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/culture/>)

Food & Drink

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/food-drink/>)

### About Us

Letters

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/letters-to-the-editor/>)

Contact Us

(<https://www.rimonthly.com/contact-us/>)

ADVERTISE  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/about-us-advertise/>)



(<https://www.facebook.com/RIMonthly>)



([http://twitter.com/intent/user?screen\\_name=RIMonthly](http://twitter.com/intent/user?screen_name=RIMonthly))



(<http://instagram.com/rimonthly#>)

Health  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/health/>)

Home & Style  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/home-style/>)

[Things To Do \(/things-to-do/\)](#)

About Us/Advertise  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/about-us-advertise/>)

eNewsletters  
(<https://info.rimonthly.com/newsletter-landing-page>)

Subscriptions  
(<https://ezsubscription.com/rim/subscribe>)

Custom Publications  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/pub/>)

Privacy Policy  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/privacy-policy/>)

DMCA Policy  
(<https://www.rimonthly.com/dmca-policy/>)

© 2023 Rhode Island Monthly Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

 (<https://www.bloxdigital.com/>)