



Logo Design by Shawn Highsmith

Highsmith Family Reunion
June 19 - June 21, 2025
Atlanta Georgia

Remember the Ancestors

Updated by Fran Coleman/Diedra Hollins

Original Authors: Shirley Leak & Kathleen Graves

Our legacy began on January 31, 1900, in Wilmington, North Carolina,
with the union of Maggie Farrow and James Highsmith in marriage.

MARRIAGE LICENSE.

To any Ordained Minister of any Religious Denomination, or to any Justice of the Peace, for New Hanover County.

Mr. Willis Farrow having applied to me for a license for the marriage of Mr. James Highsmith of Wilmington NC aged 21 years, color Colored the son of Washington Highsmith and Alice Highsmith Mother living in Wilmington NC and Miss Maggie Farrow of Masonboro township aged 18 years, color Colored daughter of Joseph Farrow and Alice Farrow both living in Masonboro township

It appearing that M_____ of the parties _____ under eighteen years of age, and written consent of _____ to the proposed marriage having been duly filed with me in accordance with Sec. 6 of an Act of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, entitled "An Act concerning Marriages, Marriage Settlements and the Contracts of Married Women," ratified the 12th day of February, 1872, and there being no legal impediment known to me.

YOU ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED, WITHIN ONE YEAR OF THE DATE HEREOF, TO CELEBRATE THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE AT ANY PLACE WITHIN THE COUNTY OF NEW HANOVER.

☒ You are required, within two months after you shall have celebrated the proposed marriage, to return this license to me at my office with the blanks therein filled according to the facts, under penalty of forfeiting Two Hundred Dollars to the use of any person who shall sue for the same.

Issued this 31st day of January, 1900

Fee, \$ _____

W. H. D. Smith
Register of Deeds for New Hanover County.
John W. L. Smith
Deputy

James "Hon" Edward Highsmith

"Papa James"

Born: February 15, 1881

Died: August 16, 1944



Mr. James E. Highsmith



James Edward Highsmith was the younger of three sons born to Washington H. and Alice Little Highsmith. He married the beautiful Maggie Farrow, and from this union ten children were born; eight survived infancies.

"Hon" Highsmith loved music. He was a member of a number of Gospel Quartets, traveling to neighboring cities to perform. He was employed by the Bullock and Heyer family as the "Colored Boss" for their colored workers. "Hon" worked in the old Southern Building on Front Street, where he maintained his office in the basement of the building. One of his duties was to pay the "Colored" help on Saturdays, run errands for the boss, and keep an eye on things.

Hon was an active member at Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church. His love for music led him to sing and direct the choir, and to train new members. Hon Highsmith owned a small grocery store and fish market in Wilmington. He was highly respected by his neighbors and friends. He was one of the first "Negroes" to own an automobile in the city of Wilmington, which made him stand out among his peers. He could be seen on Sunday afternoon, riding his family around the city showing off his prized car. Papa James passed away at the age of 63 from bronchial pneumonia caused by influenza.

Maggie Farrow Highsmith

"Mama Mag"

Born: April 29, 1883

Died: July 21, 1972



Maggie was one of four children born to Joseph and Alice Leonard Farrow of Wilmington, North Carolina. She was closest to her sister Isabella Willis ("Cutta"). She spent her early childhood here and attended the public schools in the city of Wilmington. She joined Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church at an early age and remained a life-long member. She served faithfully on the Stewardess Board and the Missionary Society until her health began to fail. After her failing health, she was made an honorary Stewardess and Missionary which she remained until her death.

Maggie met and married James Edward Highsmith. From this union ten children were born, of which eight survived infancies: Mattie Highsmith Davis Davis (deceased), Leatha Highsmith Washington (deceased), Maggie Highsmith Carraway (deceased), James Edward Highsmith Jr. (deceased), Geneva Highsmith Graves (deceased), Samuel Washington Highsmith (deceased), David Alvin Highsmith (deceased), and Joseph Henry Highsmith (deceased).

Maggie, a soft-spoken loving parent and grandparent, was the cord that bound this great family together. She was a God-loving, fun-loving, family-loving woman. She loved to read her Bible and pray out loud. She would get down on her knees beside the bed and pray for each of us by name daily.

"Mama Mag" as she was lovingly called by her grandchildren, loved family outings and traveling to visit family members in various states. She often spent the summer keeping Shirley and Armstead in Baltimore so that her daughter Geneva Graves (Tit) could take live-in nursing jobs. How many remember the pecan and pomegranate trees which were on her property; they yielded much fruit.

Mama Mag loved the beach and she enjoyed fishing. Sandy Drawhorn, her granddaughter, remembers going to buy hoop cheese and ginger snaps for Mama Mag. Green spearmint leaves and orange slice gummy candies were high on her list of favorite sweets also.

Mattie "Sister Mattie" Highsmith Davis Davis

First Born Child

Born: July 16, 1900

Died: November 24, 1994



Educated in the public schools in New Hanover County NC.

She was a lifelong member of Mount Olive A.M.E. Church. She sang in the church choir. She married William Thomas Davis and from the union produced seven children. Mattie Mae Davis Smith (deceased); Evelyn Davis Whitfield Days (deceased), William Thomas Davis (deceased), Frederick Davis (deceased); James Davis (deceased), Robert L. Davis (deceased); and Carl Davis (deceased).

In 1950, Mattie married the late Chief Petty Officer John W. Davis and embraced his daughter, Aileen Davis Doles. Her grandchildren include Sandra Whitfield Kimbro, Edward MacMillian Jr., Darnice Smith Smith, Francina Smith Coleman, Carolyn Davis Hairston, Robert L. Davis Jr., Barbara Davis, Bunny Davis, Pam Davis Glover,

Kirk Davis, and Gregory Davis, Dwight Davis, Bernard Davis, Richard Davis (deceased), and Corrine "Billy Faye" McCarey.

Mattie was a gifted pianist and soloist. She played for the senior choir at Mount Olive A.M.E. Church. Her grandchildren, nieces and nephews remember listening to her sing and play the piano when they visited her home. She was a creative seamstress, who made most of her clothes, and a wonderful cook. Her big Sunday dinner, followed by homemade ice cream and homemade pound cake, are still remembered fondly.

Leatha Mae Highsmith Washington

Second Child

Born: August 20, 1902

Died: June 9, 1965



Educated in the public schools in New Hanover County NC, she graduated from Williston Industrial High School in 1920.

Leatha was the mother of six children and two stepchildren: Margaret Washington Jackson, Bobbie Jean Washington, Leatha Mae Washington Brown (deceased), Marie Anthanette Washington White, George Washington (deceased), and Henry Washington (deceased). Stepsons: Alfred and Steven are both deceased.

Leatha was known for being pleasant, talkative, and congenial. She was a friend and an inspiration to her neighbors who resided on South 9th Street. Leatha enjoyed her family and shared a close and loving relationship with her siblings.

Leatha was a life-long member of Mount Olive A.M.E Church. She sang on the Senior Choir and served on the Missionary Board. She could be seen on Sundays proudly dressed in white sitting at the front pews of the church.

Some of Leatha's grandchildren are Charles "Eddie" Brown (deceased), Diane Washington, Earlene Brown, Angelia B. Love, Marie Brown, Felicia Brown, Maybel Brown Simpson, Earline Brown, Michelle Brown Oliver, Lionell Washington, and Melvin Brown.

Maggie "Baby" Highsmith Carraway

Third Child

Born: September 4, 1905 Died: May 31, 1965



Educated in the public schools in Wilmington, North Carolina. Baby received her Bachelors Degree and her Masters Degree in education and mathematics from North Carolina Central College.

Baby was employed as a high-school math teacher in varies counties throughout North Carolina. She was an avid reader. She could be found any time sitting on the floor or the porch with a good book in her hands.

Her marriage to Carlas Carraway, a High-school Administrator, produced no children, but she helped to raise her niece Claudia Highsmith Robertson, and she was the Godmother to her nieces Shirley Graves and Sandy Drawhorn.

Baby was a gifted seamstress and often made dresses for her two nieces and herself. Family was so important to Baby. She could be found most Sundays and holidays at the family home on South 8th Street. Although her work compelled her to move often, she was active in many A.M.E. churches, but Mt. Olive in Wilmington remained her home church.

James "Buddy" Edward Highsmith Jr.

Fourth Child

Born: December 19, 1912

Died: November 7, 1984



Educated in the public schools in Wilmington, NC, he graduated from Williston Industrial High School.

He married his high-school sweetheart, Emma Brown (deceased). They moved to Baltimore where their only child, Milton, was born. Milton died in 1988.

Buddy was a gifted musician. He loved composing music and playing the piano. His Baby Grand piano was his prized possession. His love for music landed him a job playing piano live on a local radio show in Baltimore in the early 1940's. This show was sponsored by Kermitts Furniture Store.

He moved to New York City to play in local clubs and surrounding resorts on weekends. During the week, he was employed by the New York City Public School

System. Buddy also owned and operated a small venetian blind and window shade repair shop.

After retirement, Buddy moved to Florida to be near his son and four granddaughters. In Florida he was employed as a piano player on Main Street in Disney World. Buddy's four granddaughters include Pat Highsmith Lawyer, Denise Highsmith Belton, Tracy Highsmith, and Jennifer Highsmith.

Buddy did engagements in the then segregated resorts in the Catskills Mountains. His rich baritone voice was a joy to listen to.

From his son Milton, Buddy has 4 Granddaughters: Patricia, Denice, Tracy, and Jennifer. Buddy also has 6 Great Grandchildren: Jacques, Jackie, Christy, Farrah, Farlan, and Jordan

Geneva "Tit" Highsmith Graves

Fifth Child

Born: October 30, 1914

Died: August 30, 1987



Educated in the New Hanover Public schools, and graduated from Williston Industrial High School in 1932.

She moved to Baltimore to live with her brother Buddy and his wife Emma. There she met and married Armstead Jerome Graves, February 14, 1938. From this union two children were born, a son, Armstead Jr. who died June 21, 1962, at the age of 21 without marrying or having children, and a daughter, Shirley Ann Graves Leak.

Geneva's love of learning lead her to Cortez Peters Business School, Saint Paul School of Nursing, Dundalk Community College (The Community College of Baltimore County), and The University of Baltimore, where she earned a bachelor's degree in English Literature.

Geneva acted in Community Theater and wrote poetry. She was a columnist for a weekly community newspaper, a Girl Scout leader, an active member of her church, St Matthews United Methodist Church in Baltimore, Maryland. She served as church clerk for over thirty years.

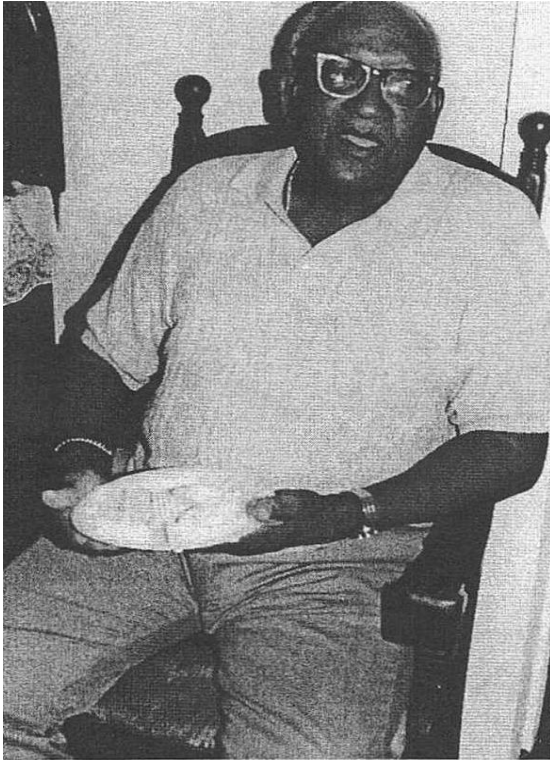
She has three Grandchildren Kathleen R. Graves, William J. Burks, and Lawrence K. Burks Jr., called Larry or Squeaky. She has three great-grandchildren Harry Teabout, Naomi Burks and William Burks Jr.

Samuel "Sammy" Washington Highsmith

Sixth Child

Born: August 10, 1918

Died: September 12, 1995



Educated in the New Hanover County Schools and attended Williston Industrial High School.

He proudly served his country during World War II in the United States Air Force. After his military service was concluded, Sammy returned to Wilmington and was employed by the United States Postal Service. He worked faithfully as a letter carrier for 32 years, until his retirement in 1978.

Sammy was a life-long member of Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church where he served as a Trustee and Treasurer.

Sammy's house was the house where all the family in town and out of town would gather. They were looking forward to getting a slice of his famous smoked turkey, or boiled shrimp and fresh vegetables from his garden. His dining room table was full of goodies any time you went to visit. Thoughtful and giving, you could always expect a special Christmas card and a gift from him.

In 1957 he married Ernestine Mack and raised three children, Samuel J. Highsmith, Sandra H. Drawhorn, and Julia Timberlake. Sammy has five Grandchildren Dr. Tasha Timberlake Hinton, Richard Timberlake Jr., Jocelyn Drawhorn, Alex Highsmith, and Lauren Highsmith.

David Alvin Highsmith

Seventh Child

Born: November 4, 1920

Died: May 17, 1996



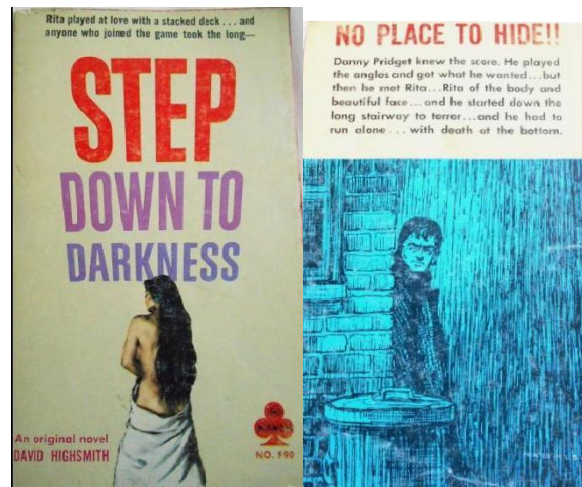
Educated in the public schools of New Hanover County, North Carolina.

At a very early age David enlisted in the United States Navy and served in Hawaii. After completing his military obligations David settled in New York City.

David's first marriage to Elizabeth Ellerby resulted in two daughters, Gladys and Daisy Lee (deceased). His second marriage, to Mary Willie (deceased), brought two sons, David and Marcus. The family lived in The Bronx, New York.

As a young man David was active in Community Theater and known for his gift of storytelling, often delighting his nieces and nephews with his engaging tales. David loved to dance and was a hit with the ladies.

David was also a talented singer and writer. He frequently performed alongside his brother Buddy, entertaining audiences at the then-segregated resorts of the Catskill Mountains. His deep baritone voice left a lasting impression on those who heard him. In addition to his musical talents, David was a skilled mystery writer. His debut novel, [Step Down to Darkness](#), was published in 1960.



David was employed in the garment district until his retirement; he often gifted his sisters with beautiful dresses.

Joseph Henry Highsmith
Eighth Child

Born: September 9, 1923 Died: June 19, 2012

Educated in the new Hanover Public schools, and graduated from Williston Industrial High School in 1941.



Joe was the baby of the family, he was loved and spoiled by all his siblings. He was educated in New Hanover County, NC. When he was very young, he ran away to Dillon, South Carolina to marry his childhood sweetheart, Claudia Andrews. This union produced three children, Joseph Jr., Carlos, and Claudia (deceased).

At an early age Joe was a skilled businessman. He and his father ran a grocery store and fish market; coal and wood were sold at the back entrance. After the death of his father, Joseph went into a partnership with Robert Pierce. They contracted to do home improvements for Sidberry properties, and they did repairs for The Sidberry Baby Hospital.

He spent many years working for a number of Insurance companies. (North Carolina Mutual, United, and Citizens Security Life). This made him well known and respected in the surrounding communities. He worked his way up from agent to staff manager.

A fisherman and an avid boater, Joe could be found on the intercostals waterways in one of his boats. (Can anyone remember the boat's name?) He was talented at restoring and reupholstering furniture. His love for the road and family led him to travel up and down the East coast to visit family members, from Florida to New York State.

Joe was a member of Mt. Olive A.M.E. Church all of his life. He served his church in many capacities, as trustee, treasurer, choir member, soloist, and Men's fellowship.

Joe is the father of seven children, Joseph Henry Highsmith Jr., Carlos Maceo Highsmith, Claudia Mae Highsmith Robertson (deceased), Wayne Highsmith, Vaughn James (deceased), Meta Watts and Dr. Greta Watts. His grandchildren include Michael Highsmith, Joseph "Kelvin" Highsmith Sr, Ronald Highsmith, Diedra Highsmith Hollins, Cheryl Robertson Dammons, Vance Robertson, Carlos Shawn Highsmith, Carla Highsmith (deceased), Eric Joyner, Faraji Highsmith, Zinara Highsmith, Joi Highsmith and Preyah James. Great Grandchildren: Pamela Sledge, Joey Highsmith, Daniel Highsmith, Kalia Highsmith, Samiya Highsmith-Hollins, Grayson Highsmith-Hollins, Kaelyn Leatherbury, Zachary Dammons, Jerimiah Dammons, Rakeeme Joyner, Simeon Highsmith, Knight Highsmith, Veyana Highsmith, and Zaria Highsmith.

Joseph Henry Highsmith
Brother of James Edward Highsmith ("Hon")
Born: September 29, 1869 Died: March 30, 1926



Hon's brother, Joseph Henry Highsmith, was a noted opera singer. Opportunities for "colored" classical musicians were few in the United States at that time, so he left the United States and moved to England where he could find work. He married an English Educator, and they had two children. Joseph never returned to the United States due to the anti-miscegenation laws, which made his union unlawful in the United States at that time. He kept in touch with his family through letters and gift boxes. At the time of his death, Henry was in rehearsal for a part in the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth.



Josephine Morcashani
Wife of Joseph Henry Highsmith
Born: January 28, 1870 Died: 1929



Joseph Henry's wife, Josephine Morcashani, was a world-renown entertainer before and after WWI. She was a famous baritone (contralto) singer in Europe. Explore her story: [Hearing Ghosts: The Life & Times of Josephine Morcashani | UCL European Institute - UCL - University College London](#)