

# A HIDDEN COLLECTION

## HELEN BALFOUR MORRISON:

### Masterful Modern



# HELEN BALFOUR MORRISON

Photographer Helen Balfour Morrison (1901-1984) started as a commercial photographer in Evanston, Illinois, but took up her camera as a serious artist in the 1930s. Rockwell Kent sat for her and introduced her to Bill Kittredge at the Lakeside Press, who suggested she do a book on Great Americans.

In the 1930s she began seeking out notable personalities, most of whom she approached and asked to photograph, often doing several sittings in a day. She also photographed people in all walks of life – individuals, families, and children. In the 1940s, the work continued from her new home in Northbrook.

In the 1950s she set this work aside and primarily photographed the modern dancer, Sybil Shearer, with whom she had developed a collaborative artistic partnership. The Morrison-Shearer Foundation in Northbrook, Illinois, now holds these collections.

The unusual nature of Morrison's portraits became evident early in her career. J.B. Neumann, of the New Art Circle Gallery in New York, said in 1946, "Mrs. Morrison photographs the soul." That same year David Daiche, Scottish literary historian then at the University of Chicago, put it this way:



*Helen Balfour Morrison, Self Portrait*

Anyone who has seen Helen Morrison at work will appreciate the amount of effort and energy she devotes to the task of getting her subjects to symbolize themselves in a manner which the camera can capture. She does this without arousing any suspicion in the person being photographed that a deliberate "drawing out" is taking place. She will argue with a writer or a painter about his work, challenge the judgment of a critic, get a poet excited about the interpretation of some particular poem – in every case searching for the key to the individual's personality, trying to achieve a revelation of the essential kind of action or repose (for it might be either) which immediately floodlights the real man.

The key might be some slight gesture, a fleeting expression across the face, a turn of the head or a movement of the hands, but no photograph will be taken until it has been found, even if it means that a whole day has to be wasted. She has indeed often spent a whole day working on one person – not working in any obvious or technical sense, but seeking through conversation and other means to induce her subject to drop, for one moment at least, that conventional mask which we all wear when facing the world.

The person being photographed does not himself know when that moment has been reached, for we only drop our masks when our spontaneous interest in whatever is going on has been so aroused that we become our essential selves without any self-consciousness at all.

# | PORTRAIT SUBJECTS

The Morrison-Shearer Foundation holds prints and/or negatives for the individuals listed below. This partial list includes subjects intended for Morrison's never-completed series of portraits of Great Americans as well as others, including non-American notables. Morrison is recorded as having photographed a number of other individuals for whom the Foundation has neither print nor negative.

\*Asterisks indicate those for which there are only negatives.

## ACADEMICS & PHILOSOPHERS

|                                 |                                                        |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| G.A. Borgese                    | Italian refugee and political writer, professor        |
| David Daiches <i>circa 1940</i> | Scottish literary historian, critic                    |
| Lord Bertrand Russell           | British mathematician, philosopher, writer             |
| [Mrs.] Alfred North Whitehead   | wife of English mathematician and philosopher, Harvard |

## ACTORS & PERFORMERS

|                                |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| *Frederick Chramer             | Kungsholm puppet opera              |
| Ina Claire                     | stage actress, comic dramas         |
| Ruth Draper                    | monologist                          |
| William Elliott                | theater performer, producer, writer |
| Helen Hayes                    | stage actress                       |
| Walter Huston <i>pre-1945</i>  | actor                               |
| Laurette Taylor <i>1946</i>    | stage actress                       |
| Ethel Waters <i>circa 1934</i> | stage and motion picture actress    |
| Don Vestal                     | puppeteer                           |

## ADVENTURERS

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Amelia Earhart <i>1935</i> | aviator |
|----------------------------|---------|

## ARCHITECTS, PLANNERS & LANDSCAPERS

|                                      |                                                      |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| David Adler                          | architect                                            |
| Ernst Benkert                        | architect                                            |
| Roy "Bud" Binkley                    | architect                                            |
| Alfred Caldwell <i>circa 1936</i>    | architect, landscape architect                       |
| *Melville Chatten                    | architect, chair, Committee 1933 Century of Progress |
| George Elmslie                       | architect                                            |
| *Ludwig Karl Hilbersheimer           | city planner                                         |
| Jens Jensen <i>circa 1935</i>        | landscape architect, conservationist                 |
| *George Fred Keck                    | architect                                            |
| Samuel Marx                          | architect                                            |
| *Edgar Miller                        | architect, painter, sculptor                         |
| Dwight Perkins                       | architect, planner                                   |
| Eliel Saarinen                       | architect                                            |
| Robert E. Seyfarth                   | architect                                            |
| Mies van der Rohe <i>circa 1945</i>  | architect                                            |
| Frank Lloyd Wright <i>circa 1935</i> | architect and wife, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright           |

## ARTISTS & PAINTERS

|                                             |                                          |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Gertrude Abercrombie <i>circa 1943</i>      | painter                                  |
| Ivan Le Lorraine Albright <i>circa 1935</i> | painter                                  |
| Malvin Marr Albright                        | painter                                  |
| *Boris Anisfeld                             | painter                                  |
| Milton Avery                                | painter                                  |
| Aaron Bohrad                                | painter                                  |
| Raymond Breinin                             | painter                                  |
| *Anita Willets Burnham                      | painter, writer                          |
| Carol-Lou Burnham <i>circa 1935</i>         | painter                                  |
| Marc Chagall <i>1945</i>                    | painter, sculptor                        |
| Francis Chapin                              | painter                                  |
| Julio de Diego <i>circa 1944</i>            | painter                                  |
| Philip Evergood                             | painter                                  |
| Lyonel Feininger                            | painter                                  |
| Frances Foy <i>pre-1944</i>                 | painter                                  |
| *Rowena Fry                                 | painter                                  |
| Lee Gatch                                   | painter                                  |
| Robert Gwathmay                             | painter                                  |
| Malcolm Hackett                             | painter                                  |
| Margo Hoff                                  | painter                                  |
| Edward Hopper                               | painter                                  |
| Willard Charles Johnson                     | painter                                  |
| Bernard Karfiol                             | painter                                  |
| *Rockwell Kent                              | painter, printmaker, illustrator, writer |
| Benjamin Kopman                             | painter                                  |
| John McCutcheon                             | cartoonist, illustrator                  |
| Hans Moller <i>1945</i>                     | painter                                  |
| *Karl Nolde                                 | painter                                  |
| Ed Paschke <i>circa 1972</i>                | painter                                  |
| *Irene Rice Pereira                         | painter                                  |
| Constantine Pougialis                       | painter                                  |
| Karl Priebe                                 | painter                                  |
| Abraham Rattner <i>1946</i>                 | painter                                  |
| Felix Ruvelo <i>circa 1945</i>              | painter                                  |
| Flora Schofield <i>circa 1945</i>           | painter                                  |
| William S. Schwartz <i>circa 1935</i>       | painter, singer                          |
| *Ralph Fletcher Seymour                     | artist, publisher, Alderbrink Press      |
| John Sloan                                  | painter                                  |
| Raphael Soyer                               | painter                                  |
| John Stenvall                               | painter                                  |
| Julia Thecla <i>pre-1944</i>                | painter                                  |
| Joyce Treiman                               | painter                                  |
| Michael Marius Ursulescu                    | painter                                  |

## ARTISTS & PAINTERS, CONTINUED

|                             |         |
|-----------------------------|---------|
| Laura Van Pappelendam       | painter |
| Max Weber <i>circa 1946</i> | painter |
| Rudolph Weisenborn          | painter |

## ARTS SCHOLARS, ADMINISTRATORS & CRITICS

|                                    |                                                           |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| *Percy Eckhardt                    | president, Art Institute of Chicago                       |
| Robert B. Harshe <i>circa 1935</i> | director, Art Institute of Chicago                        |
| Katherine Kuh                      | art historian, curator, critic, dealer                    |
| J.B. Neumann <i>circa 1946</i>     | art critic, author, owner New Art Circle Gallery, NYC     |
| Wilhelm Valentiner                 | authority on old masters, director, Detroit Museum of Art |

## ATHLETES

|               |                                  |
|---------------|----------------------------------|
| Althea Gibson | African-American tennis champion |
|---------------|----------------------------------|

## BUSINESS LEADERS

|                                |                                                        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Albert Wadsworth Harris        | banker, endowed Chicago Community Trust                |
| Stanley Harris                 | commercial banker, philanthropist                      |
| Clarence B. Randall            | chairman, Inland Steel, national political appointment |
| *[Mrs.] Julius Rosenwald       | philanthropist and wife of president of Sears Roebuck  |
| Edward L. Ryerson Jr. and Mrs. | president, Inland Steel, founder of WTTW               |
| Herman Dunlap Smith            | industrial insurer, philanthropist                     |

## DANCERS, CHOREOGRAPHERS & CRITICS

|                                 |                                                          |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| George Bockman <i>1946</i>      | dancer, interior designer                                |
| Col. W. de Basil                | director, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo                    |
| Vicente Escudero                | Spanish flamenco dancer                                  |
| Dale Fern <i>1950</i>           | dancer, critic                                           |
| Hanya Holm <i>1946</i>          | German-born modern dancer, choreographer                 |
| Louis Horst                     | modern-dance teacher, musician with Martha Graham        |
| *John Martin                    | New York Times dance critic                              |
| John Neumeier <i>circa 1960</i> | director, Hamburg Ballet, Germany                        |
| *Shanta Rao <i>1957</i>         | leading exponent of Indian dance                         |
| Sybil Shearer <i>circa 1945</i> | pioneer modern dancer, choreographer, friend of Morrison |
| Muriel Stuart <i>circa 1954</i> | protégé of Anna Pavlova, dance teacher                   |

## EDUCATORS

|                         |                                                   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| *Flora Cooke            | founding principal, Francis W.Parker School       |
| Perry Dunlap Smith      | founder, North Shore Country Day School, Winnetka |
| *Dr. Edward J. Sparling | president, Roosevelt College                      |
| *Dr. Sophie Theilgaard  | superintendent, District 2 Chicago Public Schools |
| Dr. Mary Wooley         | president, Mount Holyoke College                  |

## GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Carter S. Harrison Jr  
Harold Ickes

Mayor of Chicago, 1897-1905 and 1911-1915  
U.S. Secretary of Interior, 1933-1946

## JOURNALISTS & CORRESPONDENTS

\*Herbert Asbury  
Carrol Binder  
Ray C. Brown  
Charles Dennis  
\*Frank Gervasi  
Edgar Ansel Mowrer  
\*Howard Vincent O'Brian  
Hal O'Flaherty  
\*Clifford S. Raymond

journalist & author known for true crime books  
foreign correspondent, Chicago Daily News  
critic, Washington Post  
editor, Chicago Daily News  
world-renowned foreign correspondent  
foreign correspondent, Washington DC, Pulitzer Prize 1933  
author and columnist, Chicago Daily News  
war correspondent in the Pacific, editor Chicago Daily News  
author, chief editorial writer, Chicago Tribune

## LAWYERS & JUDGES

Judge Florence Allen

first woman federal judge, U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals,  
1934-59

\*Judge Theodore Brentano *circa 1935*  
Frank Loesch *circa 1935*

Superior Court Illinois, first U.S. Minister to Hungary, 1922-27  
founder, president, Chicago Crime Commission and Secret Six  
(Capone), 1922-38

## MEDICAL DOCTORS & RESEARCHERS

Dr. Charles Sumner Bacon  
Dr. Joseph Brenneman  
Dr. Loyal Davis  
Dr. Joseph DeLee  
Dr. Harry S. Gradle

chair, obstetrics and gynecology, University of Illinois  
pediatrician, head of Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago  
Chicago's first neurosurgeon, Nancy Reagan's stepfather  
obstetrician, founder of Lying-in Hospital, Univ. of Chicago  
ophthalmologist, founder of Pan American Assoc. of  
Ophthalmology

Dr. Anna Hamman  
Dr. Ludwig Hektoen  
Dr. Maude Slye *1947*

pathologist, radiation therapy  
pathologist, Cook County Hospital, Univ. of Chicago  
cancer pathologist, Univ. of Chicago, "America's Marie Curie"

## MUSICIANS & CRITICS

Ernst Bacon  
Madi Bacon  
\*Felix Borowski  
Nadia Boulanger  
\*Cecil Burleigh  
John Cage *1947*  
John Alden Carpenter  
\*Desire De Faue  
\*Leon Fleischer  
Rudolph Ganz

composer  
choral conductor, co-founder San Francisco Boys Chorus  
composer  
composer, conductor, teacher  
composer, violinist  
composer  
composer  
conductor  
pianist  
composer, conductor, pianist

## MUSICIANS & CRITICS, CONTINUED

|                                   |                                         |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| *Dorothy Lane                     | harpsichordist                          |
| Eugene Ormandy <i>circa 1940</i>  | conductor                               |
| *Milton Preves                    | violinist                               |
| Arturo Rodzinski <i>1940</i>      | conductor                               |
| Izler Solomon                     | conductor                               |
| Leo Sowerby                       | organist, composer, Pulitzer Prize 1946 |
| Frederick Stock <i>circa 1940</i> | conductor, violinist, composer          |
| George Szell                      | conductor, composer                     |

## PHOTOGRAPHERS

|                        |                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ruth Bernhard          | photographer                    |
| Helen Balfour Morrison | photographer, lighting director |

## POETS

|                             |                                         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Louise Bogan                | poet                                    |
| Robert Frost                | poet                                    |
| Robert Lowell               | poet                                    |
| *Harriet Monroe             | poet, founder of Poetry Magazine        |
| Marianne Moore              | poet                                    |
| Jessica Nelson North        | poet, editor                            |
| Muriel Rukeyser <i>1944</i> | poet                                    |
| *Lew Sarett                 | poet, professor Northwestern University |

## SCIENTISTS & INVENTORS

|                                  |                                                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| James Henry Breasted <i>1935</i> | archaeologist, founder Oriental Institute, Univ. of Chicago |
| Arthur Compton                   | physicist, worked on atomic bomb, Nobel Prize 1927          |
| Paul Nicholas Leech              | chemist, director AMA Chemical Laboratories                 |
| *Carl Pfanstiehl                 | scientist, chemical laboratories                            |
| *Bill Stout                      | inventor, experimental airplanes                            |

## SCULPTORS

|                                        |                                                       |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Alexander Archipenko <i>circa 1935</i> | sculptor                                              |
| *Copeland Burg                         | sculptor                                              |
| *Edouard Chaussaing                    | sculptor                                              |
| Nancy Coonsman Hahn                    | sculptor                                              |
| *Sylvia Shaw Judson                    | sculptor, daughter of architect Howard Van Doren Shaw |
| Richard Lippold <i>1949</i>            | sculptor, industrial designer, dance critic           |
| Carl Milles                            | Swedish sculptor                                      |
| *Laura Slobe                           | sculptor, WPA artist, Socialist Workers Party         |
| John Storrs                            | sculptor                                              |
| *Lorado Taft                           | sculptor                                              |
| Jesus Torres                           | sculptor, worked with Edgar Miller                    |

## SOCIAL ACTIVISTS

|                           |                                                                   |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr. Edith Abbott          | dean of Social Services, University of Chicago                    |
| Grace Abbott              | head of U.S. Children's Bureau, Hull-House                        |
| Jane Addams               | founder of Hull-House, activist, Nobel Peace Prize 1931           |
| Jessie Binford            | head of Juvenile Protective Association, Hull-House               |
| Louise DeKoven Bowen      | philanthropist, Hull House                                        |
| Sophonisba Breckenbridge  | lawyer, University of Chicago faculty, Hull-House                 |
| *Carrie Chapman Catt      | suffragist, founder of League of Women Voters                     |
| Ethel Sturges Dummer      | philanthropist, University of Chicago Social Services, Hull-House |
| Father Edward G. Flanagan | founder of Boys' Town, Nebraska                                   |
| Frances Crane Lillie      | philanthropist, Hull-House                                        |
| Lola Maverick Lloyd       | suffragist, peace activist                                        |
| Rev. Graham Taylor        | social reformer, founder of Chicago Commons                       |

## THEOLOGIANS

|                            |                                                   |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Dr. Charles Whitney Gilkey | dean of Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|

## WRITERS & PLAYWRIGHTS

|                                  |                                                          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Nelson Algren                    | writer                                                   |
| Sherwood Anderson                | writer                                                   |
| Isabel Bolton                    | writer                                                   |
| Theodore Dreiser <i>pre-1945</i> | writer                                                   |
| Fritz Faulkner                   | writer                                                   |
| Ludwig Lewisohn                  | writer, editor, Zionist                                  |
| Thomas Mann <i>pre-1945</i>      | writer, Nobel Prize Literature 1929                      |
| Christopher Morley               | writer, editor                                           |
| Sterling North                   | writer                                                   |
| Clifford Odets                   | playwright                                               |
| *Elder Olson                     | poet, playwright, literary critic, University of Chicago |
| Gertrude Stein                   |                                                          |
| & Alice B. Toklas <i>1934</i>    | writer and art collector                                 |
| Glenway Wescott                  | writer                                                   |
| Thornton Wilder                  | playwright, novelist                                     |
| Richard Wright <i>pre-1937</i>   | writer                                                   |

## REPRESENTATIVE PORTRAITS

## JENS JENSEN

**Helen Morrison:** “Jens Jensen was the beginning of my career as an artist in photography. A friend had invited me to hear him speak. When he said, ‘This morning as I stood in my woods and looked out over the great Green Bay, I felt I could lay down my hat and meet my Maker, suddenly I knew there was a Maker, after years of denying it’. After the speech was over and all the people had left, I was still sitting and my friend said quietly, tapping me on the shoulder, ‘Don’t you think we should go?’ I got up and went home, made my own printing machine, and decided I would take pictures until I felt good enough to photograph Jensen. A year later I made my first portrait of him.”



## ETHEL WATERS

**Signed:** “To Helen Morrison, who brought out something in me in this picture I never knew I possessed. Believe me. Ethel Waters.” Photographed when Waters was starring in *As Thousands Cheer* in Chicago, 1934.



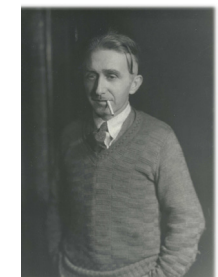
## SYBIL SHEARER

**Sybil Shearer:** “This is one of the first pictures Helen Morrison took of me. I remember my father looking at it long and hard, as if he had never seen me before.”



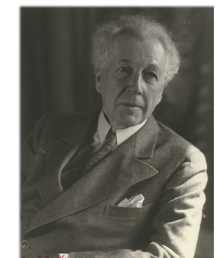
## IVAN LE LORRRRAINE ALBRIGHT

**Signed:** “I like the color and the feeling that makes this photograph a sincere work of art”. Ivan Le Lorraine Albright.



## FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

**In a letter of introduction:** “Helen Morrison really took my picture and ‘got it’ –so it seems to others – and to me. What I have seen of her work has simplicity and a kind of integrity rare in the field she works in. I am happy to see this and say it”. Frank Lloyd Wright.



# REPRESENTATIVE PORTRAITS

## AMELIA EARHART

This pensive pose is unique among the myriad photographs of this pioneer aviatrix. Nothing is recorded as to when or where this photograph was taken, but it was undoubtedly during one of Earhart's many visits to Chicago.



## JOHN T. McCUTCHEON

**Signed:** "This is a lovely demonstration of the value of light and shade, when it is done by an artist in photography". With best wishes. John T. McCutcheon.



## JULIA THECLA

**Florence Arquin, ART News:** "In 'Julia Thecla and Her Chicken,' Morrison captures that elusive sense of the fantastic that is always associated with Julia and her paintings."



## THEODORE DREISER

**Helen Morrison:** "He was nice, he was pleasant, but I hadn't been there five minutes before I knew why all the other photographs of him were tissue-paper thin. He wasn't going to play. So I made up my mind I would have to blast. I wasn't going to walk out with nothing."

I said, 'Mr. Dreiser, I suppose you think *An American Tragedy* was quite a book?' He looked startled. 'I have a certain amount of respect for it. Why do you ask?' Working with my camera I said, 'Well, if that was all you ever wrote I wouldn't have walked across the street to photograph you.' Now he was not only startled, he was angry. But he answered, 'Well, I see you are here. What did you like?'

'Yes, you did write something I liked.' 'What was that?' 'Olive Brand.' 'You liked that?' He screwed up his handkerchief between his hands. 'Yes, I did.' 'Why?' I got my camera ready to shoot. 'Because I liked her and all of it was true.' 'Yes,' he said, 'I like her and all of it was true.' I clicked the shutter just the split second before he burst into tears."



## DR. MAUDE SLYE

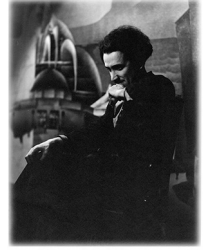
**Signed:** "This seems like meeting myself."



### WILLIAM S. SCHWARTZ

**Signed:** “I’ve been photographed many times, but it was always a photograph. In the work of Miss Morrison I find more art than in the work of the professional portrait painter. Sincerely”. William S. Schwartz.

**Florence Arquin, ART News:** “A poetic mood is found in the portrait of William Schwartz, which, to those who know this musician, artist, and friend of poets, is characteristic.”



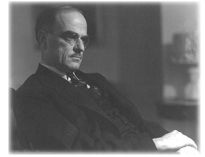
### INA CLAIR

**Helen Morrison:** “I went backstage to see Ina Clair who had just given a sparkly performance, and I said to her, ‘I saw your pictures in the lobby and I don’t think they do you justice.’ She saw my camera, smiled, and said, ‘What would you do?’ I said, ‘Stand right there.’ But it was the smallest dressing room in the world and there was no place for me to stand but on the commode.”



### THORNTON WILDER

**Signed:** “We live by accident and we die by accident, or, we live by design and we die by design. Now, which is it? I still don’t know, but here you’ve found me working on it”. Thornton Wilder.



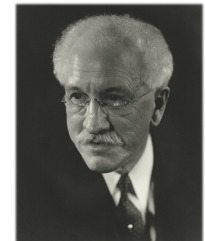
### SOPHONISBA BRECKENRIDGE

**Helen Morrison:** “She was the first woman admitted to the bar in the state of Kentucky, and she had to take an oath never to bear a deadly weapon and never to bear a child. Breckenridge Hall at the University of Chicago was named for her.”



### DR. JAMES H. BREASTED

**Signed:** “On an Egyptian tombstone over 4000 years old I find written: ‘A man’s virtue is his monument, but forgotten is the man of evil repute.’ I wonder if this picture will last as long”. James H. Breasted, April 26, 1935.



All of Morrison's museum exhibitions were shown in the ten years between 1939 and 1948. After that she was absorbed in supporting the career of the modern dancer, Sybil Shearer.

### CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF DOCUMENTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1935 WINNETKA, ILLINOIS. Winnetka Woman's Club. First show, arranged by artist Carol-Lou Burnham without Morrison's knowledge. Estimated date.
- 1936 CHICAGO ILLINOIS. O'Brien Gallery, 673 North Michigan Avenue, 25 portraits. Also, Group of African-American prints from "*Sugar Hill and String Town*" collection.
- 1937 WINNETKA, ILLINOIS. New Trier High School, portraits.
- 1937 WINNETKA, ILLINOIS. Winnetka Woman's Club, 70 portraits of Winnetka children.
- 1938 WINNETKA, ILLINOIS. New Trier High School, 25 portraits.
- 1939 WILMETTE, ILLINOIS. Woman's Club of Wilmette. Portraits, also North Shore residents.
- 1939 INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA. Indianapolis Art Museum. "*Sugar Hill and String Town*."
- 1939 WILMETTE, ILLINOIS. Woman's Club of Wilmette. Wilmette portraits.
- 1944 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. Art Institute of Chicago, One-person show in separate room within 48th Annual Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity. [*Frank Lloyd Wright bought 5 of his portraits*]
- 1945 MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN. Layton Gallery of Art, "*Art of Camera*," 40 portraits.
- 1946 DETROIT, MICHIGAN. Detroit Institute of Arts, "*100 Prints of Artists in America*."
- 1946 NEW YORK CITY. New Art Circle Gallery (J.B. Neumann), 33 portraits curated by Mr. Neumann.
- 1947 TOLEDO, OHIO. Toledo Museum of Art, "*100 Prints of Artists in America*."
- 1947 KENOSHA, WISCONSIN. Kenosha Museum of Art, 25 portraits.
- 1947 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. Renaissance Society, Mandel Hall, Univ. of Chicago, 55 prints: "*The Inheritance*" (photographs of Sybil Shearer), "*Sugar Hill and Stringtown*" and "*Creative Americans*."

- 1947 CLEVELAND, OHIO. 1030 Gallery, 30 portraits.
- 1947 DAYTON, OHIO, Dayton Art Institute, 100 portraits.
- 1947 CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA. Mint Museum of Art, 25 portraits.
- 1947 COLUMBUS, OHIO. Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, 100 portraits.
- 1948 COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO. Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center,  
“*Artists in America.*”
- 1948 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS. Institute of Contemporary Art.
- 1950 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. Chicago Public Library, “*Artists in America.*”

## MORE ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

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Helen Balfour was born in 1901 in Evanston, Illinois, the daughter of Fannie Lindley (whose father, Charles, was a key architect of the Northwestern University campus) and Alexander Balfour, an engineer and a proud, aristocratic Scotsman. Helen and her younger brother Malcolm (“Mac”) grew up in relative comfort until their mother became ill. Helen, then in high school, took a job in a camera store to help pay for medicines and doctor bills. When her mother died, Helen was 16. Against her father’s wishes, she decided to eschew college. She took a job in a big photography studio, learning to use the portrait camera and to develop and print photos. Her creative marketing ideas helped expand the business, which focused on weddings, families, graduations, and school yearbooks. Before long she and her brother Mac went on their own, knocking on doors in the suburbs.

In 1925, Helen married Robert Morrison, then a newspaper writer with *The Herald Examiner*, and they moved into the Library Plaza Hotel in Evanston. Through their friends, mostly writers and reporters, Helen developed a taste for modern literature and became distinctly modern in all ways. Then, in the early years of her marriage she became seriously ill when a strep throat developed into a virus that affected her heart, requiring months of bed rest.

Unable to work herself, she reserved another room in the hotel, put in phones for a solicitor and a salesman, and ran operations from her bed. Mac was the photographer and thus began the Malcolm Balfour Studio. Soon more employees were added and the Studio became a very creative and successful business, run by Helen with energy and drive until another illness occurred, this time life-threatening. While gradually recovering, Helen decided to turn the studio over to Mac and move to Winnetka with Bob, seeking a more balanced and creative life.

In Winnetka she soon met the artist, Carol-Lou Burnham, who took her to hear the charismatic and spiritual landscape architect Jens Jensen. This was an epiphany that made Helen decide to advance her skills so she could make a portrait truly worthy of Jensen. Her first subjects were young artists and friends from Winnetka, and after a year she felt ready to ask Jensen to sit for her. This was the early 1930s.

While preparing to photograph Jensen, Helen was already making portraits of other notable individuals as well - sometimes doing four or five portrait sittings a day in Chicago. Rockwell Kent sat for her and introduced her to Bill Kittredge at the Lakeside Press, who suggested she do a book on Great Americans. She began more actively seeking out notables and asking to photograph them, while continuing to accept paid work photographing individuals, families and children as her livelihood.

Always alert to what was going on in Chicago, the list of notables whom Helen photographed grew. Her first significant exhibition was in 1936 at the O’Brien Gallery on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. [This exhibition also included “*Sugar Hill and String Town*,” an amazing collection of sensitive photographs of African-American life in rural Kentucky circa 1935.]

Many of Helen’s subjects were architects, and in 1940 she and Bob (by then an advertising executive with Colliers) had Robert Seyfarth design a new house for them in rural Northbrook, IL. There Helen set up her dark room in the basement and continued to make portraits. This modest house and its surroundings also became the site of many festive occasions and a rich creative milieu, especially after Sybil Shearer became part of Bob’s and Helen’s lives.

In 1942 the modern dancer Sybil Shearer (1912-2005) moved to Chicago from New York, and Helen attended one of her early performances. Of their first meeting, Sybil Shearer wrote, “When I met Helen Morrison I felt I had come into the orbit of something special, someone who could see further than I could.” Struck by Morrison’s keen eye and wit and her studied, unorthodox use of light, Shearer asked Morrison to do her stage lighting for a performance at the old Goodman Theatre. Though Helen resisted at first, knowing nothing about stage lighting, she soon became fully involved in Shearer’s career and was her artistic collaborator for the next 40 years. She also designed and built Shearer’s residence/studio nearby in Northbrook.

During the 1940s Helen took fewer and fewer portraits, though she added notables whenever she accompanied Sybil to New York. Between 1936 and 1950 her collections were shown at major museums in Chicago, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Boston, New York City, Colorado Springs, Charlotte NC, and in Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo.

By 1950 Morrison’s photography focused almost entirely on Sybil Shearer, creating a large collection that documents the legacy of their “artistic collaborations”. Of Helen, Sybil has written:

“Although Helen Balfour Morrison never completely recovered from the damage to her heart, she lived into her eighty-fourth year full of creative energy in every activity she undertook. She was a designer of stage lighting, a short story writer, an architect, a costume designer, an impresario and a cinematographer, but always she was the photographer with or without a camera.”

## HELEN'S NOTEBOOK 1937

|               |                        | Developed | Red Proofs | Printed | Mounted | Being Shown | Amount | Order Printed | " Mounted | " Delivered | " Collected |                     |
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| May 1, 1937   | Hazel Cornell          | ✓         | ✓          | ✓       | ✓       | ✓           | 00     |               |           |             |             |                     |
| " 4, 1937     | X Mrs Jos. T. Bowen    | ✓         | ✓          | ✓       | ✓       | ✓           | 00     |               |           |             |             |                     |
| May 8, 1937   | X Mrs. Wm Hetteran     | ✓         | ✓          | ✓       | ✓       | ✓           | 25     | ✓             | ✓         | ✓           |             |                     |
|               | Robt Hershe            | ✓         | ✓          | ✓       | ✓       |             |        |               |           |             |             |                     |

# HELEN'S LETTER 1948

MORRISON | SHEARER  
FOUNDATION

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART NEW YORK

11 WEST 53rd STREET  
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900  
CABLES: MODERNART, NEW-YORK

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

February 26, 1948

Mrs. Helen Balfour Morrison  
Lee Road  
NorthBrook, Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mrs. Morrison:

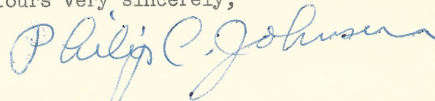
I am glad that you came in to see me yesterday  
to straighten out the matter of the Mies por-  
trait.

I believe everything has been satisfactorily  
arranged. I have already made out an order for  
you to be paid \$50.00 for the purchase of a  
print of the Mies portrait. I shall personally  
promise that this photograph will be exhibited  
within reasonable time in some exhibition of the  
Museum of Modern Art.

I have not spoken to Mr. Neumann.

I wish also to take this opportunity to apologize  
for the trouble this has caused you, and to assure  
you that for the next edition of the book we shall  
get in touch with you concerning the portrait.

Yours very sincerely,



Philip C. Johnson

PCJ:jaf

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.



Mrs. Helen Balfour Morrison  
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NorthBrook, Chicago, Illinois

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