

THROUGH THE LENS:  
THE LIFE AND LEGACY  
OF HORACE BRAZELTON  
CURATED BY HISTORIAN STEFANIE HAIRE



## TRAILBLAZING AFRICAN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER HIGHLIGHTED IN EXHIBIT JUNE 7 – SEPT 15

*Through the Lens: The Life and Legacy of Horace Brazelton*

CHATTANOOGA (May 30, 2023) - This summer, the remarkable life and contributions of Horace Brazelton (1877 – 1956) are the subject of a public exhibit titled, “Through the Lens: The Life and Legacy of Horace Brazelton.” Curated by historian Stefanie Haire, the exhibit, hosted by Ruby Falls, shares the groundbreaking career and empowering community leadership of Brazelton.

As the first African American to open a professional photography studio in Chattanooga, Horace Brazelton’s prolific career photographing middle-class Black communities across the region spanned the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 1904 to 1956. His camera lens captured countless portraits of Black families and individuals, as well as Black church, professional and civic groups, at a time when access to photography was limited, and mass media frequently portrayed African Americans unfavorably and inaccurately.

### **About the Exhibition**

The exhibit features Brazelton’s artistic merits as a nationally recognized, award-winning portrait photographer whose work embodied the humanity of the people he depicted, as well as his considerable endeavors as a community leader. During the era of Jim Crow laws in the South, Brazelton supported and invested in Black Chattanoogaans. As a proponent of civic responsibility, Brazelton facilitated voter registration drives and voter participation, encouraged property ownership to support community stability, established Black history remembrances, and championed small business development and economic growth in the Black business district located on East 9th Street, now called Martin Luther King Boulevard, and in the surrounding area.

Drawing on several years of extensive research, historian and exhibit curator Stefanie Haire presents the exhibition that examines the roots of Brazelton’s legacy through his portrait photography and community contributions. Her ongoing research has been in partnership with the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University and Picooga (Chattanooga Historical Society), with contributions by Bessie Smith Cultural Center, the Library of Congress, the African American Cemetery Preservation Fund, Presbyterian Historical Society, Walden’s Ridge Civic League, Dr. Earnestine Jenkins, River City Company, Emory University, the Chattanooga Public Library, and the Southeast Tennessee Development District.

“These photos capture more than just simple moments in time, but rather represent hundreds of lives who helped build Chattanooga, and the memory of their legacies,” states Stefanie Haire, historian and curator of the exhibit. She adds, “the largest body of Mr. Brazelton’s portraits remains in private family collections or are now difficult to locate.”

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"Ruby Falls is honored to host this exhibit," says Hugh Morrow, Ruby Falls president and CEO. "Horace Brazelton was truly a talented artist, remarkable entrepreneur and committed community leader. We are delighted and humbled to share his story and contributions."

### **Exhibition Highlights**

Exhibit highlights include a re-creation of Brazelton's professional photography studio, portrait gallery featuring his work, early 20<sup>th</sup> century photo enlarging equipment, historical context timeline, and an audio presentation featuring a reading of the 1917 speech Horace Brazelton gave at the annual conference of the National Negro Business League. The exhibition addresses Jim Crow era laws and shares a powerful representation of how the people depicted in Horace Brazelton's Black portraiture differed from mass media's frequent portrayal of African Americans.

### **Visit the Exhibition**

Exhibit admission is free and open to the public June 7 – Sept 15 at Ruby Falls in the circa 1929 castle. Ruby Falls tickets are not required to visit the exhibit. The exhibition is open 8:00 AM – 8:00 PM. For more information, visit [www.rubyfalls.com/special-events/horace-brazelton-exhibit](http://www.rubyfalls.com/special-events/horace-brazelton-exhibit).

Approved images and press kit: <https://bit.ly/BrazeltonExhibit>



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### **About Ruby Falls**

Ruby Falls is home to the tallest and deepest underground waterfall open to the public in the United States. Over half a million guests visit the thundering waterfall annually, located 1,120 feet beneath the summit of Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, TN. Committed to cave conservation and environmental sustainability, Ruby Falls is the first attraction in the United States to earn certification from Green Globe and is recognized as a leader in tourism sustainability. [www.RubyFalls.com](http://www.RubyFalls.com).

Examples of Horace Brazelton's portraits and a 1907 Brazelton Studio advertisement:



**ATTENTION!**



I do not ask your size or age, I only ask that you have your pictures made at "BRAZELTON'S." I have just finished a special course in posing, lighting and retouching. I have a new line of fall mounts and folders that will please. I have added several new posing chairs, backgrounds and vignettes. I strive to please. My motto: The best is none too good for my patrons. So come and see "BRAZELTON" the successful Photographer, who is always thinking of your needs and supplying them with artistic Photography.

Call at the gallery for prices. Some special at \$4.00 per dozen; smaller sizes at less money. Watch street cars for new styles. A deposit of one-half required on all work.

**Location: 514 East Ninth Street**  
Between Douglas and E Streets