In the early 50s your scribe had the opportunity to interview Fletcher Henderson and his wife, Leora in their once fashionable "striver's row" residence in Harlem, U.S.A. Little did I realize how significant this meeting would be as Fletcher's life was just about over - and a great life it was. Up on their living row wall there was a large fascinating picture which had all the appearance of being nearly a painting. It pictured a lady with a well formed smiling Face, pretty Features with large set searching eyes. I asked For the identity and "Smack" (Henderson’s nick-name) retorted, "THAT’S ROSA HENDERSON, THE FAMOUS BLUES SINGER". I further queried excitedly, "Is she related to you? Where is she? Is she still active?" He answered, "No, but I worked with her many times on recordings. She passed away a long time ago." This left a lump in my throat as Rosa was one of my favorite vintage blues artists.

BUT FLETCHER WAS WRONG. Just about 20 blocks away there lived a hale and hearty ROSA HENDERSON who at that time had been away from show business for nearly 2-decades. She was regular employee of one of New York City's large Department stores - and the show world was just a fond memory. Actually we did not Find this out until 1963. It was spot luck. Yours truly in the company of Victoria Spivey who had met Rosa years before, and Gracie Allen (no relation to George Burns? Gracie? smiles!!) who was a show trouper buddy of Victoria's, brought up the name of Rosa Henderson. Miss Allen not only verified Rosa's existence but mentioned that she was in regular contact with her and would try to arrange a meeting For us. At about the same time at an X-Glamour Girls All Star Show we had the good fortune to meet Rosa's daughter, a fine performer and entertainer in her own right, and she offered us the opportunity to meet Rosa.

After all these years - and with the once distressing thought that Rosa was gone - two contacts came forth within a few weeks of each other, and opened the road for us to see this great lady of the blues. Out of the past right into the present came ROSA HENDERSON with her fine throaty booming blues voice with its swinging rhythmic qualities who had made many a fine recording in the 20s - and who by todays standards is a blues Queen of almost legendary status. What would she be like today?

My query was answered. It was truly one of the most exciting moments when Victoria Spivey and your reporter met the ROSA HENDERSON in June of 1963. When we rang her door bell, a full loud voice sounded off like a bell, almost in melodic form, "WHO'S THERE?" She knew who is was!! (smiles). And she knew we were coming - and graciously made our visit a very happy one. The first thing that came to our attention was her large eyes which mirror everything about her - and her beautiful long braided hair made up in Indian fashion. She possesses a natural cheerful disposition. When excited her voice just breaks out like an echo chamber and fills every corner of the room. And the comedienne is all over - just a natural ham as she mugs and spouts quips of her memories in an amusing manner.

She was born ROSA DESCHAMPS, November 2, 1896, in Henderson Kentucky. She began her career about 1913 in her uncle's carnival show. She played tent and plantation shows all over the South with one long streak of 5 years in Texas. She sang nothing but the blues. During this period she married Slim Henderson, a great comedian and showman, and she became professionally, ROSA HENDERSON. She entered vaudeville in New Orleans with her husband. One of her most delightful remembrances of this period was seeing Lizzie Miles in a carnival riding an elephant. Slim joined up with John Mason and from this association a troupe was born which included Rosa. They played the country from one end to the other. In the mid 20s the Mason Henderson troupe really began to hit big time with headline attraction bill–ing in many of the larger theatres. Rosa also received star billing in some independent
ventures. In 1927 she was in a musical comedy revue, THE HARLEM ROUNDERs, at Harlem's New Alhambra Theatre which also featured Tim Moore and Edgar Hayes Symphonic Harmonists. Another 1927 Alhambra show for Rosa was THE SEVENTH AVENUE STROLLERS which also included Lena Wilson, Manton Moreland and husband, Slim. Still another 1927 musical was RAMBLIN AROUND with Eddie Hunter and Amanda Randolph. Slim and Rosa had a delightful show-stopper in the show called, "On A South Sea Isle".

From May 1927 through September 1927 Rosa Henderson was a top race blues recurring artist. She was on Victor, Vocalion, Ajax, Perfect, Pathe, Brunswick, Paramount, Emerson, Edison, Columbia, Banner, Domino, Regal, Oriole, English Oriole, Silvertone and others. Besides her own name she was Flora Dale on Domino; Mamie Harris and Josephine Thomas on Pathe and Perfect; Sally Ritz (her sister's name) on Banner; and probably Sarah Johnson and Gladys White on other labels.

She speaks glowingly of Fletcher Henderson who helped her out immeasurably with her recordings. She can still remember Fletcher busily scoring her music for her on a noisy subway train as they were studio bound. She remembers veteran pioneer P & B publisher, Joe Davis, musicians: Cliff Jackson, Louis Metcalf, Rex Stewart, Coleman Hawkins, Wendell Talbert, Bub Miley and James P. Johnson. She mentioned that she never feared the great Bessie Smith, professionally, but she had a great deal of respect for Mattie Hite.

In 1927 Rosa was hitting her real stride as a single but just a year later Rosa quit in her prime due to the unexpected death of husband, Slim. She was totally disheartened. She made a few more appearances including one with Slim's partner, John Mason and another with a Frank Montgomery production in Atlantic City but that was just about the end of the show business road for Rosa. In August f 1951 she returned to the recording studio and made her last recording with James P. Johnson for Columbia.

Rosa Henderson retired and settled down to the normal existence of mother and household provider. Her daughter entered show business and was a top chorine in many shows.

Today Rosa is a great grandmother with a great grandson who she idolizes. In January of 1964 Rosa did venture away from obscurity and was a guest at Victoria Spivey's Mamie Smith benefit at the Celebrity Club in Harlem. It was hoped that she would sing but it did not happen. However it was wonderful to see Rosa in the public light again. The ovation she received when MC Boots Marshall introduced her was indeed heartwarming and sincere. It certainly proved that she was not forgotten.