

## ***Thelma Stone - Historical ongoing research***

**Born** - 12-1904 (actual day of each month still missing) **Passed:** 2/28/1981

Daughter of the late Charles and Janie L. Morgan Whitten

Some historical locations of interest related to Thelma Stone and her family.

1934 -Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop at 224 Ellis St, Bluefield WV (Jane Whitten's (Thelma's Mother) home and restaurant location.

1934 - Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop moved to 133 Wilson Street, Bluefield WV.

1934 - Record of Oltha Stone (Thelma's Husband) was "counterman" at Jane's Café (name change from Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop) - Address still 133 Wilson Street.

1935 - (5-16-1935) Address and name change to Greenland Café at 844 Bland Street, WV

1938- Possible name change back to Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop at 844 Bland Street, WV

1938 - It appears Jane Whitten's sister, Helen Whitten took over the original Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop at 224 Ellis Street, Bluefield WV. Renamed it Blue Ribbon Cafe . Some research suggests a new owner - in name only - to be Thelma Stone.(On going research here may prove of interest as this was Thelma's original home with Mother Jane). It now appears (as per Google "Street View") to be an empty lot.

1942 - Thelma Stone - current Manager of Florence Hotel at 105 Wilson Street Bluefield WV. Chas. A. Florence - owner of this Hotel catered exclusively to colored individuals. Restaurant at this Hotel named "Jane's Dining Room".

1945 - 09-20-1945 Oltha Stone - Thelma Stone's husband passes away - Buried at Oak Grove cemetery.

1947 - In March Thelma Stone buys 1/4 interest in the future Hotel Thelma. She also acquires the remaining 3/4 interest that same month, by separate deed . In 1950 the 3/4 deed is Court Ordered to be re-executed due to defective drafting.

***The above recapitulation, while taken from reputable publications of the time, required extensive cross-checking, as not all journalist "got it right". The foregoing notwithstanding, I leave you with the assurance that you may place a high degree of confidence in the days and dates set forth herein.***

Joëlle K.D. Mahoney





### MRS. OTHA STONE

Mrs. Otha (Thelma Marion Witten) Stone, 76, of 1047 Wayne St., Bluefield, died Saturday morning in a Bluefield hospital after a long illness.

A native of Pocahontas, Va., she was the daughter of the late Charles and Janie L. Morgan Witten. She had been a resident of Bluefield for the past 51 years and had attended the public schools of Pocahontas and Bramwell. She was a graduate of Morristown College at Morristown, Tenn.

She was a member of the John Stewart United Methodist Church of Bluefield, The United Methodist Women, the Eureka Temple No. 339, Daughter Elks of Bluefield, Matron of Princess Ann Court No. 127, Heroines of Jericho of Princeton, Queen Ester Court No. 2, Order of Eastern Star of Bluefield, Friendly Neighbor Senior Citizens R.S.V.P. and was a member of the Bible Auxiliary and the National Association of Retired Persons. She had operated businesses in Bluefield for over 40 years.

In addition to her parents and husband, she was preceded in death by a sister, Helen Witten.

Survivors include one daughter, Mrs. Carol F. Bailey of Morgantown; two sisters, Mrs. Mary E. Woods and Mrs. Ruby F. Robinson, both of Bluefield; three foster daughters, Mrs. Irene Brewer of Penns Grove, N.J., Miss Helen Woods of New York, N.Y., and Mrs. Dorthula West of Keystone; and two grandchildren.

Funeral services will be conducted Tuesday at 11 a.m. at the John Stewart United Methodist Church with Rev. James Davis, Rev. Idus Jones, Rev. Lawrence Beale and Rev. Leonard Davis officiating. Burial will follow in Monte Vista Park Cemetery on the Bluefield-Princeton Road.

Masons will serve as pallbearers. Honorary pallbearers will be members of the United Methodist Men of John Stewart United Methodist Church, Jack Carey, Guy Johnson, Allen Marsh, Lester Sims, Sr., John Coates and Chester Brewer.

Flowerbearers will be Heroines of Jericho, O.E.S. Daughter Elks, United Methodist Women and friends.

Friends may call at Richardson Funeral Home in Bluefield from 6 to 9 p.m. today, where an Elk memorial service will be conducted at 7:30 p.m., followed by a masonic service at 8 p.m.

The body will be taken to the church one hour prior to services on Tuesday.



## OTHA STONE

Funeral services will be held this afternoon at 3 o'clock for Otha Stone of Pocahontas, who died Tuesday morning at 2:40 in Denmar sanitarium, Denmar, following several months illness.

The services will be conducted at Sinkford Undertaking Parlor, Bluefield, by the Rev. T. G. Howard of John Stewart Methodist church. Burial will be in Oak Grove cemetery. He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Thelma Stone, Bluefield, W. Va., and his father, John Stone, Pocahontas.

Pallbearers will be Oble Martin, Dewey Rowden, Ellis Powers, William Taylor, Spurgeon Billipps and Matthew Jones.





Staff photo by Charles Boothe

Rev. James Mitchell, left, and Skip Crane stand in front of Hotel Thelma on Wayne Street in Bluefield, making plans to launch a project to restore the historic hotel, which was listed on the 'Green Book' during the 1950s and 60s.

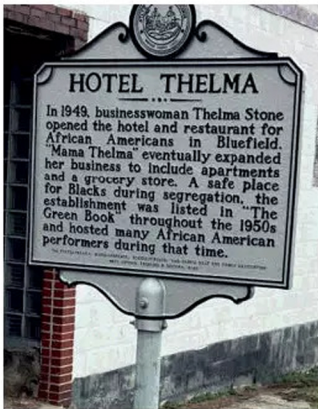
# Project under way to restore historic Hotel Thelma

By CHARLES BOOTHE  
*Bluefield Daily Telegraph*

The long-abandoned Hotel Thelma's faded cinderblock exterior sits now in contrast to the large 'block glass' windows in front that beckon to a past when it was once a haven for African-American travelers in Bluefield.

The two-story rectangular building still sits on the corner of Wayne and Logan streets on the city's North Side, near the Grant Street Bridge, and a historic marker in front briefly tells the hotel's story, a story now being revived in an effort to restore and promote one of Bluefield's most significant landmarks.

Rev. James Mitchell Sr., who now owns the hotel, told members of the Bluefield City



Staff photo by Charles Boothe

Board Tuesday that restoring the landmark is an "important issue," especially during Black History Month.

"Hotel Thelma was more than just a hotel," he said. "It was a symbol of hope and

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### Hotel...

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hospitality for the black community, offering refuge for black travelers."

The hotel was on the list of places to stay for African-Americans in the "Green Book," which was circulated in the black communities from 1936 to 1967 so visitors would know where they could stay during an era that Jim Crow laws prevented African-American citizens from staying in most hotels or eating in most restaurants.

Those laws also applied to many up-and-coming black musicians who needed places to stay when they came into cities to perform.

In fact, Hotel Thelma hosted many of America's most famous musicians, Mitchell said, including Ike and Tina Turner, Sam Cooke, Etta James, James Brown, Little Richard and many others who performed in the Bluefield Auditorium.

"The Green Book served as a guide for African-Americans to navigate the Jim Crow laws," he said. "Hotel Thelma became a popular destination during the 50s and 60s with emerging black jazz and pop musicians."

Travelers Inn, a smaller hotel during the era, is still intact and sits nearby Hotel Thelma.

But it was the determination of Thelma Stone, for whom the hotel is named, that created this piece of Bluefield history.

"In 1947, the ambitious Thelma Stone walked into the Flat Top National Bank to apply for a loan despite discrimination faced by African-Americans during this time," Mitchell said. But she did secure the loan and built Hotel Thelma, which opened in 1949.

Restoring the historic hotel would help bring communities together, he said.

"We need to embrace the history of this city," he said. "Mercer County has



Lewis

the highest percentage of blacks than any county in the state. That should be recognized."

Mitchell said the recognition comes from supporting people of color and bringing everyone together as a community for the city.

"We have to lead by example," he said of making everyone in the city part of the wider community, which was neglected in the past.

"We are all part of Appalachia," he said. "We have to listen to each other. We have to educate each other."

Mitchell has applied for non-profit status for the hotel so can undertake fundraising efforts and he asked the city and the community to help with the project, which can help make the East End and North Side "viable to the city, but also part of the community."

Skip Crane, a member of the board of the Bluefield Arts Revitalization Corp. (BARC), said this is a project to bring people to Bluefield because people will get off the interstate to see a Green Book hotel.

"People get off the interstate for experiences," he said, and delving into history is an experience, so the hotel could serve as a museum, reflecting that history.

Crane pointed to the restoration and success of the Granada Theater in Bluefield, which was on the verge of ruin before a project was started to restore it. The Granada reopened

in August 2021 and now is a showcase facility for movies, music and performances.

"We are asking for some help," he said. "We can do this. We can do this together."

No one knows more about Hotel Thelma and Thelma Stone than Dr. Carolyn Bailey Lewis, who is now retired and lives in Athens, Ohio and has a distinguished career of her own, including being the first woman and first African-American to be general manager of a Public Broadcasting System television station.

"Mama Thelma" was Lewis's great-aunt and took her in when she was 6 months old after her own mother became ill in Pittsburgh.

"I grew up in Hotel Thelma," she said. "I was wiping off tables when I was 3 years old. I later cooked. We did everything."

She said Mama Thelma learned her cooking and business skills from her mother, Janie Whitten, who ran Janie's Green Leaf Restaurant on Bland Street.

Lewis said Mama Thelma taught her how to work hard and be successful as the hotel, which included a restaurant and grocery store on the first floor, was a "hopping place."

"She got up at 4:30 or 5 in the morning and worked until 10 or 11 at night," Lewis said. "She was phenomenal. I learned so much from her."

Lewis eventually ran the grocery store.

Lewis said everyone would get extra excited when billboards went up promoting a well-known artist, like James Brown, coming to Bluefield, and being connected with Hotel Thelma gave them a chance to see the big names up close.

"When I was 7 years old, I took dinner to room 22," she said, which turned out to be Ike and Tina Turner's room. "She took the tray and gave me a dollar. I thought I was in heaven."



Staff photo by Charles Boothe

### Hotel Thelma

Lewis is now in the process of writing a book about her life there and the working title is: "Mama Thelma: Her Life, Purpose, and Legacy."

Lewis said when she was 12 years old, her parents were in El Paso, Texas and sent word they wanted her back.

Here is an excerpt from her book on the trip:

"The Green Book was full of history and listings of where 'Negroes' could stay and eat in each state. Mama Thelma was fair-skinned and could 'pass' in some southern white restaurants. Of course I couldn't being dark-skinned, so she would tell me to stay down in the car while she went in to get takeout. There were times she would go into a grocery store and buy food that she would cook roadside at a rest stop or wherever we would see a roadside grill. God certainly protected us. We arrived in El Paso and, after a week's visit, I told my parents my home was with Mama

Thelma. To celebrate my decision, this brave, entrepreneurial woman drove on to California (she had friends in Anaheim) and we went to Disneyland!

The farther west we went, the less segregation. Mama Thelma and I had such a love for each other. Driving herself, with the Green Book and me (I was the navigator sometimes), she motored across country and back to West Virginia - about 5,000 miles round trip. What lessons I learned along the way."

"I am who I am because of her," Lewis, who has many professional accolades and will soon join her long-time friend Dr. Patrice Harris in the Academy of Distinguished Alumni at West Virginia University, said about Thelma Stone.

Harris, also a Bluefield native, was the first African-American woman to be president of the American Medical Association. Lewis said Harris was actually born at Hotel Thelma.

Lewis spearheaded the

drive to get the historical marker placed in front of the hotel and is now working with city leaders on the Hotel Thelma project.

"I have talked with Cecil Marson (Bluefield City Manager) and Peter Taylor (City Board Vice Chair) about a plan," she said. "If they (and Mitchell) can get the funding, if they can get it restored, I am all for it."

Lewis said it would be great for the hotel to be turned into something that can be toured.

After integration, the hotel was no longer needed, she said, and eventually was turned into an apartment building until it closed in the mid-1990s. Mama Thelma died in 1981.

But its legacy, as well as the woman who created it, is rich with history.

Mayor Ron Martin is on board with the project.

"I think it's a great project," he said. "And I think it is needed."

Martin said plans need to be put together and the city is willing to help.

— Contact Charles Boothe at [cboothe@bdtonline.com](mailto:cboothe@bdtonline.com)

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Bluefield Daily Telegraph

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## People

**Carolyn Bailey Lewis**, formerly of Bluefield, is now one of 17 public television professionals recognized



as an "Outstanding Grassroots Advocate," by the Association of American Public Television Stations.

Lewis is the director of public information and graphic designs for the Morgantown, WV public radio station. She is the only public information professional in the entire Public Broadcasting System to be singled out for the honor.

Lewis has been employed by WNPB for more than 18 years. During this time she has won awards on the state, regional and national levels for promotions. She was named legislative liaison for WNPB by General Manager Philip Willis and maintains communications with West Virginia's Congressional delegation.

She attended Bluefield public schools and is the daughter of the late Thelma Stone and great-niece of Mary Woods of Bluefield. Lewis is married to Robert F. Lewis, a Morgantown businessman. They have two children, Carey, 22 and Caryn, 16.

*Thelma's "niece"*  
*Not Grand niece*



## MRS. J. J. FOSTER

Funeral services for Mrs. Jacqueline Johnson Foster of 1047 Wayne St., Bluefield, who died Tuesday at her home following a long illness, will be conducted Saturday at 10 a.m. in the Sacred Heart Church. Father William F. Carr will officiate and burial will follow in Oak Grove Cemetery at Bluewell.

The rosary will be recited Friday at 8 p.m. at Sinkford - Richardson Funeral Home, Bluefield.

She was a native of Pocahontas, Va., and had been a resident of Bluefield for the past 10 years. She was a former nurse in St. Anthony's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Survivors include a daughter, Carolyn Foster, a student at West Virginia University; her mother, Mrs. Ruby Johnson of Pittsburgh, Pa., and two aunts, including Mrs. Thelma Stone of Bluefield, with whom she made her home.

Pallbearers: Daniel Dowell, Robert Gunter, John Eaves, Arthur Lee Glover, Charles Smith and Ahart Powers.

The body will remain at the funeral home, where friends may call after 6 p.m. Friday.

*daughter  
of Ruby Johnson  
sister of Thelma.*

*residing  
Thelma S.*



# Neighbors still shocked over Robinson's death

By ED CABBELL

of the Daily Telegraph staff

Neighbors of Ruby F. Robinson are shocked that she was found dead Thursday in an apartment she shared with her sister at 1047 Wayne St. in Bluefield.

Bluefield City Police are still investigating a robbery and possible murder of the 77-year-old woman. According to police reports, she was found dead lying on the side of her bed with her feet resting on the floor early Thursday morning. Her bedroom was toward the south of an apartment she shared with her sister, Mary "Ms. Tiggle" Woods. She was taken to Princeton Community Hospital by the Bluefield Rescue Squad, where she was pronounced dead on arrival.

Neighbors are concerned because the eld-

erly women were "good people who would try to help anyone who needed help," said James French, a Wayne Street resident.

"People with no other place to go could find a place to stay with them if they needed one," French said. "I guess someone figured they had some money and being two elderly ladies, they would be an easy mark."

Reported to be "strong supporters of the down and out," the sisters were known to feed and take care of people whom others would reject.

"I recall an elderly lady that no one would be bothered with who was taken in and cared for by this family," said Delores French. "They were very community minded and they supported church and school functions."

Expressing disbelief in the tragedy, several neighbors cite the benevolence of the sisters

and also included their deceased sister, Thelma Stone, as examples of people who were sympathetic to people with problems and always willing to extend a helping hand.

"People talk about a community watch today," said Mary Frances Brammer. "Ms. Thelma and her sisters had a community watch program before the term became popular. If they thought that they needed to check on you, they would do it."

The family had a small store and hotel that many members of the neighborhood depended upon when in need.

"They would literally pick people up off the streets to help them," said Brammer's husband, Rudolph. "Young or old, regardless of who you were they would give you food and a place to sleep if you needed it. There place served as a shelter for many people."

MURDER OF THELMA'S SISTER  
AT HOTEL THELMA. 8/12/87



## COLORED PERSONALS

Misses Hallie Mauldin and Helen Witten motored to Pocahontas Sunday to visit Mrs. Lillie Habor.

Mrs. Walter Saunders and daughter: Miss Mary Witten, Mrs. Ruby Johnson, Mrs. Thelma Stone and Miss Jacqueline Johnson attended the opening of Hillside View at Wolfe yesterday.



# Police Officers Raid Local Hotel

The Florence hotel, Wilson street, was raided early Sunday morning by Sgt. Charles H. Fox, Patrolmen Ted Land, Roby Brown, Paul Oliver Richard Lambert and C. P. Crigger, led by Lt. O. M. Patton of the local police department according to a report at the local police station yesterday.

Three couples, all colored, were arrested on fornication and adultery charges and Thelma Stone, colored operator of the hotel was charged with operating a house of ill-fame. The seven persons were given a hearing in police court last night.



## NEWS OF THE COLORED PEOPLE

### CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST

844 Bland street. Service tonight at 8. Elder W. M. Patterson in charge. All are welcome.

### PLAYGROUNDS OPEN

Playgrounds will be open on the north and south sides today and Monday afternoon from 1 to 4. Beginning Tuesday afternoon they will be open from 2 to 4.

### CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST (Pentecostal)

200 Wilson street. Regular church services tonight at 8 with preaching by Bishop C. F. Kyle. All are cordially invited. An interesting program will be rendered at the church Sunday evening in connection with the special rally being staged during the day for the benefit of the church.

### BIRTH NOTICE

Born to the Rev. and Mrs. T. B. Wright Wednesday morning, a fine 10-pound son. Mrs. Wright before her marriage was Miss Ethel Mae Clements, of Roanoke, Va.

### EMERGENCY CLUB

The Emergency club of the Scott Street Baptist church will meet Friday evening at the home of Mrs. Bessie Brown, 153 Jones street, at 7:30. All members are asked to be present.

### MRS. SANDERS PASSES

Mrs. Janie L. Saunders, 319 North Mercer street, passed quietly away

at 5 a. m. Thursday at her home after a lingering illness. Mrs. Saunders is well known throughout the city, having resided here for the past 10 years. She was a member of John Stewart M. E. church and a native of Mercer county. She is survived by her husband, Walter Saunders; four daughters, Mrs. Thelma Stone, Mrs. Helen Woods, Mrs. Mary Woods and Mrs. Ruby Johnson, all of Bluefield; one brother of Mayberry, and one sister of Pittsburgh. Funeral arrangements will be announced later.

### RECEPTION

The ninth anniversary of the pastor of N. S. United Holy church came to a close Wednesday night, July 24, with a reception given in honor of the pastor and her guests at the home of Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Daniels, 504 Park street. The dining room was beautifully decorated in the color scheme of yellow, red and green and garden flowers. An appetizing two-course dinner was

served to the Rev. Mrs. Mary L. Glenn, the Rev. Mrs. Marian Callaway, Elder and Mrs. T. Brown, Mrs. Emma Spencer, the Rev. W. H. Hawthorne, Deacon W. D. Green and Deacon Otis Phenazee. The presents were presented by Mrs. Zeola Brown.

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# DAILY TELEGRAPH READERS WARNED BY TRUE "B.O." CONFESSION



# Bluefielder Takes Screenwriter Job

Carolyn Bailey, formerly Carolyn Foster of Bluefield, and the daughter of Mrs. Thelma Stone of Bluefield, has accepted as position as television writer with WWVU-TV in Morgantown. In addition to writing, Mrs. Bailey does some announcing and interviewing for the station.

WWVU-TV a Public Broadcasting Station, is operated by West Virginia University.

Mrs. Bailey began work for WWVU on Sept. Her husband, Carey Bailey, former West Virginia University basketball star, is employed by the Robert F. Kennedy Youth Center as a teacher.

Mr. and Mrs. Bailey are now making their home in Morgantown.



# **HOTEL THELMA**

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