

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

**1. Name of Property**Historic name: Bluefield Green Book Historic DistrictOther names/site number: Hotel Thelma and Travelers' Inn HotelName of related multiple property listing: Green Book Sites in West Virginia

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**Street & number: 1039-1047 Wayne StreetCity or town: Bluefield State: West Virginia County: MercerNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_national \_\_\_statewide \_\_\_local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A \_\_\_B \_\_\_C \_\_\_D

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**\_\_\_\_\_  
**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of commenting official:****Date**\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title :****State or Federal agency/bureau  
or Tribal Government**

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐  
District ☒  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Hotel

DOMESTIC/Multiple-dwelling

COMMERCE/Restaurant

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/Not In Use

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style

---

---

---

---

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

**Walls:** Brick, concrete cinder block

**Foundation:** Concrete

**Other:** Brick chimneys

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

### Summary Paragraph

The Bluefield Green Book Historic District encompasses two former hotels and apartment buildings in Bluefield in Mercer County, the Traveler's Inn Hotel and Hotel Thelma. The district spans roughly half an acre at the northwest corner of Wayne Street and Logan Street. It is situated approximately one mile northeast of Downtown Bluefield in a predominantly Black residential neighborhood. The two-story hotels were constructed in the Commercial and Moderne styles of architecture in 1920 and 1948-1949 respectively. Despite some deterioration, each retains their historic integrity. Original details include the glass block windows, casement windows, brick exterior, and brick chimneys. A vacant, grassy lot separates the two buildings.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

## Narrative Description

The documented historic resources are combination hotels and apartment buildings. The Travelers' Inn Hotel was constructed in 1920 during the rapid development of Bluefield while Hotel Thelma was constructed in 1948, in the post-World War II era. Both hotels are associated with Black history during a time of segregation and were listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Hotel Thelma was listed between 1950 and 1961 while the Traveler's Inn Hotel was listed between 1959 and 1966.

Located at the intersection of Wayne Street and Logan Street, Hotel Thelma (MC-2030) is a combination hotel and apartment building designed in the Moderne style of architecture. Construction of this concrete block building began in 1948 and was completed the following year in 1949. The hotel was constructed around a two-story, single-family dwelling and includes two separate but attached massed buildings. The first story of this resource housed a grocery store, kitchen, and restaurant that was frequented by community members, residents, and guests in the front section of the building. The rear section contained apartments. On the second floor, there are six small hotel rooms and a hallway that leads to additional apartments. The floor plans for the apartments consist of two and three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, closets, and a bathroom. This structure retains its architectural integrity. Original materials and design include concrete block walls, glass block windows, casement windows and concrete foundation.

The Travelers' Inn Hotel was constructed in 1920 on a narrow lot in the commercial style of architecture. When it was constructed, single-family residences and a vacant lot surrounded the brick commercial building. A faded advertisement for Royal Crown (RC) Cola is located on the eastern elevation and an advertisement for NEHI is located on the front facade. Like Hotel Thelma, the Travelers' Inn Hotel housed a restaurant, apartments, and hotel rooms and served a primarily Black clientele. This structure retains its architectural integrity with only minor alterations. Original materials and design include brick walls, concrete foundations, and brick chimneys.

Both hotels sit back from Wayne Street and face the Norfolk Southern Railroad mainline and downtown Bluefield. The Norfolk Southern Railroad mainline, formerly the Norfolk & Western Railroad (N&W), runs in an east-west direction in front of the two properties. The surrounding terrain consists of steep mountains. The district boundaries are Wayne Street to the south, Logan Street to the east, the west edge of Tax Parcel 11-125 to the west, and an unnamed alley to the north. These boundaries encompass Tax Parcels 11-123 (Hotel Thelma), 11-124 (a well-maintained grassy lot), and 11-125 (Travelers' Inn Hotel) and the surrounding lawn up to the edge of pavement on Wayne and Logan Streets. The surrounding neighborhood consists of single-family residences and churches.

A concrete sidewalk stretches in front of the hotels in an east-west direction before extending in a north-south direction along Logan Street. A concrete sidewalk also leads from Wayne Street to Hotel Thelma's main entrance. A well-maintained grassy lot separates the two hotels. A historical marker about Hotel Thelma is located on a small grassy lot in front of the hotel.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Hotel Thelma (MC-2030)**  
1047 Wayne Street

1948-1949

Contributing Resource

Hotel Thelma is a two-story combination hotel and apartment building with a concrete block structure and foundation. (Photo 3) The building consists of two sections: a front 4 x 3 bay section and a section extending 5 bays to the north (rear). The front section has a flat roof. A parapet wall with a metal cap extends across the front and side elevations. A sidewalk leads to the recessed main entrance, located slightly left of center on the front façade. The recessed opening is surrounded by bricks and the interior sides have glass block windows. The main entrance is a single door with a rectangular transom. Fenestration on the first story of the front façade consists of two large window openings on either side of the main entrance, each infilled with a fixed pane window surrounded by translucent glass block on three sides. A small translucent glass block window is located in the rightmost bay. On the second story, there are four 12-pane metal casement windows. All windows have brick sills. Brick belt courses stretch across the front façade and the east and west elevations above the first story and second story windows. The west elevation consists of two 16-pane metal casement windows covered in metal mesh on the first story and two 12-pane metal casements windows on the second story. A former doorway in the center of the second story on the west elevation has been infilled with glass block. The east elevation contains a metal door and a large glass block window on the first floor and two 12-pane metal casement windows and a glass block window on the second story.

The rear section of the building is a 4 x 4 bay concrete block structure with flat, hipped, and gabled roof sections. This section of the building was constructed around an earlier residence on the lot. The ell-shaped hipped roof of the residence is visible on aerial imagery and from Wayne Street. The west elevation of this section contains 12-pane metal casement windows on the first and second stories in the center bays and 9-pane metal casement windows in the outer two bays. The east elevation contains a metal door and four 6-over-6 sash windows covered with metal mesh. The second story contains three metal casement windows, one of which is partially replaced with glass block, and one 6-over-6 sash window. The rear elevation has two distinct halves. The east (left) half is partially covered with vegetation and consists of concrete blocks on the first story and deteriorating plywood on the second story. The west (right) half has a gabled roof. Each story contains two apartment entrances and two metal casement windows. The second story apartments are accessed by a one-story wood porch with concrete block supports and a wood staircase.

**Travelers' Inn Hotel (MC-2031)** 1920  
1039 Wayne Street

Contributing Resource

The Travelers' Inn Hotel (Photo 9) is a two-bay, two-story combination hotel and apartment building constructed of brick in common bond. This resource has a flat roof with a parapet wall that steps down along the side elevations. Four interior brick chimneys, two on each side elevation, extend above the parapet. A corbelled brick cornice extends across the front façade. The original storefront on the front façade has been infilled with plywood and a modern single door. The secondary entrance on the front façade and its transom are also covered with plywood. On the second story, there are paired windows with concrete lintels that are covered with plywood. Between the two paired windows is a faded painted advertisement for NEHI. The side elevations each contain four 6-over-6 vinyl replacement windows on the second story. The east elevation contains a large faded painted advertisement for Royal Crown. On the rear elevation, wood steps with a wood railing lead to a second story wood porch.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

*Integrity*

The Bluefield Green Book Historic District retains its historic integrity as it relates to the criteria outlined in the Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) *Green Book Sites in West Virginia*. Hotel Thelma and the Travelers' Inn Hotel were listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* between 1950-1961 and 1959-1966 respectively and fall within the statewide Period of Significance 1938 to 1966-1967. Both properties retain historic integrity of location, setting, feeling, and design. The hotels remain in their original locations on 0.476 acres of land on Wayne Street. The grassy lot present between the hotels has been vacant since before the Period of Significance. The brick and concrete block exteriors, chimneys, glass block windows and casement windows are original materials. Alterations include some replacement windows and removal of the Travelers' Inn Hotel storefront. However, both structures still convey their overall original design and significance as properties listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* and important sites in local Black history. There are no intrusions within the boundaries of this district. The church and houses to the west were constructed in the early 1900s and do not detract from the historic district.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY

TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Period of Significance**

1950-1966

**Significant Dates**

1950  
1959

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Bluefield Green Book Historic District consists of two hotels that were listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. This nomination is submitted under the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Green Books Sites in West Virginia* under the Historic Contexts for the Black Migration to West Virginia, Role of Black Women in West Virginia, the Jim Crow/Segregation Era in West Virginia and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Automobile Transportation in West Virginia. It is recommended eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic Heritage/Black, Transportation, and Social History for its association with *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Between 1936 and 1966, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* served as a travel guide for Black people. It assisted them with planning their domestic and international travel by providing a list of safe Black-operated and non-discriminatory businesses in all fifty US states as well as Canada, Mexico, Europe, and the Virgin Islands. Five Black operated businesses in Bluefield were featured in the *Green Book* between 1940 and 1966 including the Traveler's Inn Hotel on Raleigh Street, Hotel Thelma on Wayne Street, Travelers' Inn Hotel on Wayne Street, the Hub restaurant on Bland Street, and Kingslow's Drug Store on Bland Street. Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel were both operated by Black people and served as an important

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

social and community center for the city's Black population. Black residents not only purchased their groceries at the grocery store inside Hotel Thelma but gathered for meals in its restaurant. Hotel Thelma was listed in the Green Book between 1950 and 1961 while the Traveler's Inn Hotel was listed between 1959 and 1966.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Historic Context**

#### *Early History of Bluefield*

Prior to the arrival of the Norfolk & Western (N&W) Railroad, Bluefield, previously known as Higginbotham Summit, was sparsely populated and predominantly agricultural. Its earliest settlers included Revolutionary War veterans John Davidson and Richard Bailey. Their farmland stretched from East River Mountain to present-day Bluefield's East End and North Side neighborhoods. In 1777, the families of Davidson and Bailey established the first settlement in the area. It consisted of a fort, church, school, and mill.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of bituminous coal in southern West Virginia influenced N&W President Frederick J. Kimball's decision to construct a mainline from Radford, Virginia to Pocahontas, Virginia, located twelve miles west of Bluefield. In 1880, construction of the N&W Railroad line to Bluefield was completed. Bluefield developed from an agricultural community with a single track to an important commercial center and railroad town with a multi-track yard, offices, shops, and the headquarters of the N&W Pocahontas Division. Nine years after the arrival of the N&W Railroad in 1889, Bluefield was incorporated and its name changed from Higginbotham Summit to Bluefield due to the blue chicory flowers that covered its hillsides and meadows. Early development occurred near the railroad line and expanded as a commercial district emerged with banks, shops, hotels, restaurants, coal mine agencies, and warehouses that stocked the nearby coal company stores.

In the early twentieth century, Bluefield prospered and continued to grow as the coal industry developed in southern West Virginia. White people, Black people from the southern United States, and immigrants from Europe migrated to Bluefield in search of employment opportunities. The majority found employment with the N&W Railroad while a small number worked in professional fields including law, medicine, retail, and finance. The total population of Bluefield quickly increased from 1,775 inhabitants in 1890 to 11,188 in 1910 to its peak of 21,506 inhabitants in 1950.<sup>2</sup> The population began to decrease in the 1950s as mine mechanization resulted in the loss of jobs and residents left Bluefield in search of other employment opportunities.

#### *Bluefield's Black Community*

The population of Black people in Bluefield increased with the emergence of the railroad and coal industries, becoming its largest minority group. Early Black migrants came to Bluefield to work on the

---

<sup>1</sup> McGehee, C. Stuart, *Bluefield, West Virginia, 1889-1989: Centennial History*, page 5.

<sup>2</sup> McGehee, Stuart, "Bluefield," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/562>; 1910 United States Census Report, page 569.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

N&W Railroad mainline and resided in work camps located near the railroad line.<sup>3</sup> After the line was completed, some decided to stay and found work with the railroad as locomotive greasers, porters, conductors, and laborers.<sup>4</sup> Their wives and families soon followed and by 1890, Bluefield's Black population reached approximately 320, or one sixth of its total population. The rapid expansion of the coal industry also attracted Black workers, who constituted over 20 percent of West Virginia coal miners from the 1890s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The population continued to increase as well as the number of Black-operated businesses including barber shops, beauty parlors, grocery stores, restaurants, drug stores, and undertaking establishments.<sup>6</sup> Due to segregation, a separate Black community formed within Bluefield. Black residents first resided south of downtown Bluefield and then relocated to the North Side and East End neighborhoods after World War II. Both neighborhoods were located on the north side of the N&W railroad tracks across from downtown Bluefield. Segregated schools as well as Black residences, churches, businesses, and recreation facilities were located in these neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Black churches were first established in the late nineteenth century and became the spiritual and social centers of the Black community. In 1890, Scott Street Baptist Church was the first Black church established in Bluefield.<sup>8</sup> It was soon followed by the John Stewart Methodist Church on Jones Street, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church on Bland Street, and Mount Zion Baptist Church on Bedford Street. Three of these churches were established in or near downtown Bluefield while Mt. Zion Baptist Church is located in the North Side neighborhood.

Black residents also had separate medical professionals and facilities. According to the 1925-1926 Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics report, four Black physicians: W. A. Brown, E. W. Lomax, R. A. Pogue, and C. A. Rogers; two Black dentists: W. C. Mitchell and Alexander Staples; one Black pharmacist: J. C. Kingslow; and three registered nurses: Mrs. Esther Rollins, Mrs. Claude Kingslow, and Miss Viola G. Lewis worked in Bluefield.<sup>9</sup> Between 1916 and 1926, two hospitals opened in Bluefield to treat Black patients. In 1916, Dr. E. W. Lomax established Lomax Hospital, the first Black hospital in Bluefield on Bland Street.<sup>10</sup> The Mercer Sanitarium soon followed as the second Black hospital with Drs. C. A. Rogers and W. A. Brown as the physicians. It was located on Scott Street in Downtown Bluefield in the present-day Mercer County Fellowship Home.

Bluefield was also home to a number of Black-operated businesses including restaurants, pharmacies, and hotels. Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop and the Hub restaurant both located on Bland Street served Black customers. Kingslow's Drug Store, an independent pharmacy located at 820 Bland Street was another Black operated business. Pharmacist James Claude (J. C.) Kingslow (1890-1980) purchased the Kingslow

<sup>3</sup> Meador, Michael M, "Carving a Niche: The Blacks of Bluefield," *Goldenseal*, page 22.

<sup>4</sup> Meador, page 25.

<sup>5</sup> Trotter Jr., Joe William. "African-American Heritage," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, March 7, 2023, accessed March 14, 2024, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/27>.

<sup>6</sup> Rankin, John R, *The Early History and Development of Bluefield, West Virginia*, page 30.

<sup>7</sup> "East End and North Side African American Historic Sites: Bluefield, WV." [ArcGIS StoryMap](https://gis.transportation.wv.gov/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/a91a019da6f24766a2a9108623d54f4d?fbclid=IwAR1zDUZfprGQ0ZXQqUV0PLM3kH-FuN0ihxsG7H0dr5dp3WXWWoHMNGpKeWY). WV Department of Transportation. <https://gis.transportation.wv.gov/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/a91a019da6f24766a2a9108623d54f4d?fbclid=IwAR1zDUZfprGQ0ZXQqUV0PLM3kH-FuN0ihxsG7H0dr5dp3WXWWoHMNGpKeWY>

<sup>8</sup> Rankin, page 45.

<sup>9</sup> "The Negro in West Virginia: Report of T. Edward Hill Director-Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics of the State of West Virginia, 1925-1926," pages 45, 47, and 50.

<sup>10</sup> Rankin, page 54.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

Drug Company in 1916 from his older brother Dr. H. E. Kingslow.<sup>11</sup> Kingslow's Drug Store became a social center for Black customers with Black students and residents visiting the drug store's soda fountain after school and athletic games. The 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows two "Colored" hotels on Raleigh Street including the New Travelers Hotel and an unnamed "colored" hotel located at 500 Raleigh Street. The Imperial Hotel was the unnamed hotel.<sup>12</sup> It was constructed between 1907 and 1910 and operated until early 1924.

Even though Black and white people worked together, white-owned businesses enforced segregation policies. White-owned hotels including the West Virginian Hotel on Federal Street and the Matz Hotel on Princeton Avenue prohibited Black guests from staying overnight and eating in their restaurants.<sup>13</sup> The Granada Theater located on Raleigh Street, one of three theaters in Bluefield, required Black people to enter through a side door and sit in the balcony.<sup>14</sup> The Kresge's lunch counter located in the Kresge Department Store prohibited Black people from eating at the lunch counter.

Under West Virginia law, Black students attended separate schools. In 1890, the first public school in Bluefield for Black students, a one-room schoolhouse, opened. Two years later, the school moved into a 2-room building on Brown Street. The school educated Black students in the first grade through sixth grade. After completing the sixth grade, students transferred to the Bluefield Colored Institute (Bluefield State College) for secondary education.<sup>15</sup> Three additional Black schools were constructed between 1910 and 1949: Genoa Avenue in the 1910s, Hancock Elementary in 1925, and Park Central High School in 1949. Each of these schools was located in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

As the population of southern West Virginia increased, the West Virginia legislature created what became the state's third Black college: Bluefield Colored Institute. In 1895, West Virginia State Senator William M. Mahood introduced a bill entitled "An act to establish a high grade school at Bluefield, Mercer County for Negro youth of the State." The bill also allocated \$8,800 to purchase land and erect a building.<sup>16</sup> The following year, on December 1, 1896, Bluefield Colored Institute opened with 40 students, 20 girls and 20 boys attending.<sup>17</sup> Enrollment increased from 40 students in 1896 to 107 in 1910 to 338 in 1925. The curriculum at Bluefield Colored Institute developed from a secondary level education into a four-year collegiate institution. The presence of this institution contributed to the development of Bluefield as a social, cultural, and economic center for Black West Virginians.

### *Civil Rights*

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v the Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. The integration of schools and businesses in Bluefield was slow. Black students continued to attend Park Central High School until 1969 and Hancock Elementary until 1970. They enrolled at Bluefield High School for the 1969-1970 and Wade Elementary for the 1970-1971 school years.<sup>18</sup> Bluefield State College was the exception with white students enrolling at the college shortly

<sup>11</sup> "Notice of Dissolution" *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, page 7, February 17, 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Polk's Bluefield City Directory 1912-1912, page 387.

<sup>13</sup> "Third Annual Report of the West Virginia Human Rights Commission, page 9.

<sup>14</sup> McGehee, *Bluefield, West Virginia, 1889-1989*.

<sup>15</sup> Rankin, page 40.

<sup>16</sup> Rankin, page 43.

<sup>17</sup> Rankin, page 44.

<sup>18</sup> "East End & North Side African American Historic Sites" Story Map, WV Division of Highways.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

after the 1954 Supreme Court decision.<sup>19</sup> In later years, BSC became a predominantly white and commuter college.

Black residents began advocating for equality and non-discriminatory policies in public accommodations. Leaders at Bluefield State College and Black churches began organizing peaceful demonstrations to eliminate discrimination in public accommodations. Black people hosted sit-ins at lunch counters inside the Kresge's and Woolworth's Department Stores as well as the West Virginian Hotel. The Black community also hosted a "swim-in" at the municipal swimming pool. In March 1960, a group of Bluefield State College students picketed two movie theaters.<sup>20</sup> The protests resulted in the integration of restaurants, hotels and other businesses.

While the majority of protests in Bluefield were peaceful, one demonstration turned violent. Bluefield State College was struggling with racial tensions and discrimination since becoming integrated. A group of students were calling for the removal of Dr. Wendell Hardaway, the college's first white President. One major complaint from Black students involved the removal of numerous Black faculty members and replacing them with white faculty and staff. On November 16, 1968, students threw bricks through the windows at the Student Union Building.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by Black students bombing the physical education building before Thanksgiving break on November 21, 1968.<sup>22</sup> After the bombing, BSC President Hardaway closed the men's and women's dormitories as a way to ensure the residents' safety. The dormitories remain closed today.

With integration, Black residents lost pieces of their community. Black students no longer attended neighborhood schools with Black teachers and administrators. It was also difficult for Black teachers and administrators to find equivalent positions at integrated schools. The number of Black-operated businesses also decreased.

### *Transportation*

Early methods of transportation in Bluefield consisted of foot traffic, horse and buggies and the N&W Railroad. The 1887 and 1891 United States Geological Survey Maps of Bluefield show the N&W Railroad mainline and a north-south road between Princeton, the county seat of Mercer County and Bluefield as the main transportation routes. The ten-mile trip to Princeton along this uneven dirt road took approximately four hours one way depending on weather conditions.<sup>23</sup> Early development of Bluefield was concentrated to the north of the railroad line in the present-day North Side neighborhood. By 1894, railroad infrastructure, residences, churches, and businesses were scattered on both sides of the mainline. The close proximity of residences, businesses, and churches to the railroad line allowed both passengers and goods to be transported by train. Another important road featured was Princeton Avenue (US Highway 19), a major east-west thoroughfare that ran parallel to the mainline of the N&W.

The N&W mainline was a major mode of transportation for passengers, coal, and freight traffic. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, passengers including coal agents, Baldwin-Felts

---

<sup>19</sup> Meador, page 27.

<sup>20</sup> Stack, Sam. "Integration," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*.

<sup>21</sup> "Dorms are Evacuated for Bomb Scare at BSC" *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 17 November 1968. Page 1.

<sup>22</sup> "Bluefield State College Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 22 November 1968. Page 1

<sup>23</sup> Currence, Stubby, "New Buses Will Replace Princeton Trolleys By Middle of the Month," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. Page 2. February 5, 1947.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

Detective Agency detectives, businessmen, and residents utilized the N&W passenger service for business and personal travel. Coal companies with offices in downtown Bluefield also supplied nearby coal towns with goods. They shipped products by train from their wholesale warehouses to the coal company stores located in the Pocahontas Coalfields.<sup>24</sup>

In the early 1920s, better roads were needed to accommodate the growing number of automobiles. As discussed in the MPD *Green Book Sites in West Virginia*, State Road Commissions officials attending the Joint Board of Interstate Highways meeting in Washington, D.C were tasked with selecting roads for a new interstate highway system. Two of the roads selected were US Route 21 and US Route 19. Improved roads were usually constructed by upgrading earlier paths, wagon roads, and turnpikes, which often followed waterways as the path of least resistance through the mountains. The evolution of these roads can be viewed on topographical maps.

US Route 21 was a north-south highway constructed between Cleveland, Ohio and Jacksonville, Florida. This route entered West Virginia near Parkersburg and traveled through Charleston before arriving in Bluefield. From downtown Bluefield the route traveled through South Bluefield then over East River Mountain along present-day Route 52/Route 589 or Scenic Drive, a curvy, two-lane, mountainous road into Virginia. US Route 21 and US Route 19 followed the same route from Kanawha Falls to Bluefield.<sup>25</sup>

US Route 19 was an 801-mile, north-south highway constructed between Niagara Falls, New York at the Canada/United States line and Atlanta, Georgia. Route 19 entered West Virginia near Morgantown and traveled south through Fairmont, Clarksburg, Weston, Summersville, Beckley, and Princeton to Bluefield.<sup>26</sup> In Bluefield, U.S. Route 19 follows present-day Princeton Avenue and Bluefield Avenue between the downtown commercial district and Bluefield, Virginia. Businesses, churches, and residences were constructed along the road.

In 1930, construction of a new east-west highway between Bluefield and Huntington was already completed. US Route 52 traveled from Indianapolis, Indiana to Bluefield through a heavily populated, industrial area following State Route 8. The construction of Route 52 connected coal towns in Mercer, McDowell, and Mingo counties to large cities including Bluefield's central business and commercial district. Families from the surrounding area traveled into Bluefield on Saturdays to shop, eat, and watch movies at one of the local theaters. The increased number of automobiles traveling through Bluefield caused traffic congestion and parking problems. These roads soon reduced passenger service on the N&W Railroad.

The development of the interstate system in the 1950s-1970s greatly changed transportation in the mountainous regions of West Virginia. The West Virginia Turnpike, the state's only toll road, was authorized in 1947 and completed in 1955 between Charleston and Princeton. Originally planned as a four-lane highway, the difficulty and expense of constructing a highway through the mountains resulted in the road being mostly two-lane. In the 1970s it was decided that the best option for constructing Interstate 77 was to follow the existing turnpike route. It took 12 years, from 1976 to 1988, to upgrade the turnpike to interstate standards. When it was complete, I-77 passed by five miles east of Bluefield. By this time, changing preferences in travel, particularly the convenience of chain hotels located close to the interstate, proved detrimental to downtown establishments like Hotel Thelma and the Travelers' Inn

<sup>24</sup> McGehee, Stuart, "Bluefield," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*.

<sup>25</sup> "Markers Erected to State Line South Gate," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 4 December 1927, Section 2 page 11.

<sup>26</sup> "Bluefield Placed on U. S. Route 19 by Road Bureau," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 1926, page 1.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

Hotel. In addition, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 prohibited discrimination in public accommodation, which, while a victory for civil rights, had unfortunate negative consequences for businesses that catered to Black clientele.

### *The Negro Motorist Green Book*

During the Jim Crow and segregation era, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was a travel guide that assisted Black travelers with their domestic and international travels. As mentioned in the *MPD Green Book Sites in West Virginia*, *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was published between 1936 and 1966-1967. It provided a list of safe Black operated and non-discriminatory sites in all fifty states as well as Canada, Europe, Africa, and the Virgin Islands. In 1938, the first Black operated businesses in West Virginia appeared in the *Green Book*. The majority of Black businesses featured were located in southern West Virginia cities where 75% of the state's Black population resided. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in public accommodation, including lodging, dining, and entertainment establishments, signaled the end of the need for the *Green Book*.

A total of five Black operated businesses in Bluefield were included in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* beginning in 1940. They were the Traveler's Inn at 602 Raleigh Street (1940-1957),<sup>27</sup> the Hub restaurant at 731 Bland Street (1955), Kingslow's Drug Store at 820 Bland Street (1950-1955), Hotel Thelma at 1047 Wayne Street (1950-1961), and the Traveler's Inn Hotel at 1039 Wayne Street (1959-1966). Three of the businesses, Traveler's Inn, the Hub Restaurant, and Kingslow Drug Store were located in or near Downtown Bluefield while Hotel Thelma and the Traveler's Inn Hotel were located in the East End neighborhood.

The first Black business listed for Bluefield in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was the Traveler's Inn also known as the Travelers Hotel.<sup>28</sup> It was listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* between 1940 and 1957 under the heading "Tourist Home." The Travelers Hotel, a four-story, brick hotel opened on Raleigh Street in 1919. It was located a short, two-minute walk from the Bluefield Passenger Station on Princeton Avenue. The hotel was managed by Edward Tyree, George Carter and dentist William Mitchell before Charles (Chas) Florence became proprietor in the early 1930s. Born in North Carolina, Florence worked as a restaurant cook in Keystone, McDowell County before relocating to Bluefield where he worked as a cook at the Travelers Hotel. Under Florence's tenure, the Travelers Hotel was renovated to include rooms, a dining room and coffee shop, barber shop and taxi service.<sup>29</sup> The hotel served as a significant social center for its Black clients with reunions and other events. The hotel building was sold in October 1950 to businessman and hotel owner Max Matz.

Between 1950 and 1955, Kingslow's Drug Store was another Black operated business featured in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. This pharmacy was located at 820 Bland Street between Downtown Bluefield and South Bluefield in a two-story brick building. As mentioned in the *MPD Green Book Sites in West Virginia*, pharmacist James C Kingslow operated the Kingslow's Drug Store between 1916 and 1977. The first floor housed the pharmacy and a soda fountain while the second story was utilized as an early meeting place for the Bethel A. M. E. Church. It was later converted into a five-bedroom apartment where Dr. Kingslow and his wife resided. Like hotels and churches, Kingslow's Drug Store served as social center for the Black community.

<sup>27</sup> The Travelers Hotel on Raleigh Street operated until 1951 when it relocated to 1039 Wayne Street.

<sup>28</sup> Both the Bluefield City Directory and newspaper articles and ads use the name Travelers Hotel to describe the hotel on Raleigh Street. Travelers Hotel will be used in the text.

<sup>29</sup> "Travelers Hotel," advertisement. *The McDowell Times*. 27 March 1936, page 2.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

The only restaurant listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* for Bluefield was the Hub restaurant. It was located at 731 Bland Street on the corner of Bland and Jones Streets in downtown Bluefield. An article in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, described the Hub as a Black pool room and beer garden; it also housed a restaurant.<sup>30</sup> The Hub opened circa 1934 with Franklin H. Few, C Patsy Mingo, and Clyde Thornton listed as the owners.<sup>31</sup> Patsy Mingo continued to operate the Hub restaurant until 1960.

#### *Hotel Thelma and Travelers' Inn Hotel*

The remaining two Black businesses in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* were not located in Downtown Bluefield but in the predominantly Black East End neighborhood. They were located directly across from the N&W rail yard on Wayne Street, with Princeton Avenue/US 19 on the south side of the railroad and accessible by the Grant Street Bridge, an overpass one block west at Grant Street. Hotel Thelma and the Traveler's Inn Hotel also known as the Travelers Hotels are situated next to each other on Wayne Street. The land where Hotel Thelma and the Travelers' Inn Hotel are located was once part of John Higginbotham's farm. His farm extended from present-day Downtown Bluefield to the Grant Street Bridge and then extended across the Norfolk Southern Railroad mainline into the East End.<sup>32</sup> The N&W Railroad purchased some of this farmland for railroad purposes and began constructing a roundhouse, machine shops, and freight station. Other sections of this farmland developed as Bluefield's downtown commercial district and residential neighborhoods.

In 1891, Attorney Joseph Doran and his wife Ida Doran of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania sold over 200,000 acres of land to the Bluefield Water Works and Improvement Company.<sup>33</sup> The Bluefield Water Works and Improvement Company sold both lots and houses to prospective buyers. The land where Hotel Thelma and Travelers' Inn Hotel currently rest was part of the 200,000 acres owned by the Dorans. Two years later, Wayne Street first appeared in the 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Bluefield. However, zero structures had been constructed. By 1907, six single-family dwellings were constructed on Wayne Street including one at 1047 Wayne Street. The lot where the Travelers' Inn Hotel was constructed sat vacant until 1920 when a brick commercial building was built. The lot was purchased the previous year in 1919 by W. B. Underwood, pastor of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, and located next door to the commercial building on Wayne Street.<sup>34</sup> The East End neighborhood rapidly increased from a couple buildings in 1893 to many residences, churches, and commercial buildings in the 1920s.

#### *The Travelers' Inn Hotel*

Black travelers were limited in public accommodations when traveling into Bluefield. In the 1930s, Bluefield had seven hotels in its downtown including the Altamont Hotel, Bluefield Hotel, Commercial Hotel, and the Matz Hotel all on Princeton Avenue, the West Virginian Hotel on the corner of Federal Street and Scott Street, and the Raleigh Hotel and Travelers Hotel on Raleigh Street. Both the West Virginian Hotel and Hotel Matz had "Whites Only" policies which prohibited Black travelers from staying overnight and eating in their restaurants. Black men and women attending sporting events,

<sup>30</sup> "Colored Man is Shot, Wounded" *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 10 February 1934, page 12.

<sup>31</sup> Polk's Bluefield City Directory 1934, page 150.

<sup>32</sup> Rankin, page 2.

<sup>33</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 8. Joseph Doran and his wife Ida H. Doran of Philadelphia Pennsylvania to Bluefield Water Works and Improvement Company. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. Page 198.

<sup>34</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 25. Joseph I Doran and Ida W. Doran to the Bluefield Water Works and Improvement Company. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. Page 8.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

conferences, or family and college reunions stayed at the Travelers Hotel on Raleigh Street in downtown Bluefield.

The Travelers Hotel served the Black community on Raleigh Street until 1951 when it relocated to a two-story, brick building at 1039 Wayne Street. Editions of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* mention there may be incorrect information for the listings and this proved to be true with the Travelers Hotel. The Traveler's Inn Hotel is listed in the *Green Book* as located on Raleigh Street until 1958. However, the 1952 Polk's Bluefield City Directory and later issues has the Travelers Hotel listed at 1039 Wayne Street.

Alma Florence, the second wife of Charles (Chas) Florence, owned the Travelers' Inn Hotel also known as the Travelers Hotel. Born in Alabama, she worked as a waitress in the Travelers Hotel on Raleigh Street before becoming the kitchen supervisor. She later purchased the commercial building on Wayne Street from J. E. and Lillie Wagner in March 1951.<sup>35</sup> It was managed by Rolling W. Wartman followed by Mrs. Virginia Jones who also operated the Travelers Restaurant inside the Travelers Hotel in the 1960s.<sup>36</sup>

Before becoming a Black hotel, the commercial building served as an apartment building for white residents. During the 1930s, the future Travelers' Inn Hotel sat vacant before serving as the site of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project for a nursery school. The WPA was created in 1935 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Program to provide employment opportunities to unemployed workers. In 1937, it was the WPA site for the Bluefield Nursery, a preschool training program for 2- to 4-year-olds. Their teachers rented the building for \$20 a month.<sup>37</sup>

The Travelers Hotel on Wayne Street featured a restaurant called the Travelers Restaurant on the first floor and rooms on the second floor. It was featured in *The Negro Travelers' Green Book* between 1959 and 1966. In November 1969, Florence sold the commercial building to Carolyn Foster Bailey, niece of Thelma Stone and resident of the Hotel Thelma.<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Foster Bailey owned the building until 1988 when she sold it to Paul D. Brown and James M. Wade. It served as an apartment building and an election polling place.

#### *Hotel Thelma, 1047 Wayne Street*

Thelma Stone (c1905-1981) was a successful Black businesswoman who owned and operated Hotel Thelma. Born in Pocahontas, Virginia, Thelma Marian Witten was the eldest child of coal miner Charles Witten and his wife Janie. She attended school in Pocahontas, Virginia and Bramwell, West Virginia before graduating from Morristown College, a former Black institution of higher education in Morristown, Tennessee. She married Otha L. Stone (1899-1945), a coal miner who worked for the Pocahontas Fuel Company. Otha and Thelma Stone relocated to Bluefield, West Virginia circa 1933.

<sup>35</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 319. J. E. Wagner J to Alma Florence. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. Page 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1954*, page 358 and *Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1958-1959*, page 341.

<sup>37</sup> "Much Interest is Manifested in Nursery," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 25 December 1937. Page 13.

<sup>38</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 457. Alma C. Florence Scales to Carolyn Foster Bailey. 14 November 1969. Page 473.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

In 1934, Stone successfully applied for a business license to operate a restaurant called Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop (Greenleaf Café) located at 844 Bland Street in Bluefield.<sup>39</sup> Jane's was named after Stone's mother Jane Witten who also worked at the restaurant. Jane's Greenleaf Sandwich Shop was not listed in *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Twelve years later in 1946, Stone operated a second business, a hotel called the Florence Hotel located at 105 Wilson Street. The Florence Hotel also housed a restaurant named Jane's Dining Room and was home to Thelma Stone and her younger sister Helen Witten. Both these businesses were located south of Downtown Bluefield in a predominantly Black area. Stone announced the closing of the Florence Hotel in August 1949 and the opening of Hotel Thelma.<sup>40</sup>

In 1947, Stone acquired a loan from the Flat Top National Bank of Bluefield to purchase a piece of real estate formerly owned by Edgar R. Webb.<sup>41</sup> The site included a single-family dwelling that was constructed in the early 1900s. Stone constructed the combination hotel and apartment building around this residence. In 1948, construction of the first section of the hotel began in front of the residence. The following year, Stone erected an addition to the hotel on the east elevation of the residence and behind the front massed section. Hotel Thelma opened on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1949.<sup>42</sup> Stone's initial business license was for the operation of a hotel and restaurant and in 1953 she added the sale of beer followed by Thelma's Grocery, a grocery store in 1954. The last year Hotel Thelma was listed as a hotel in the Polk's Bluefield City Directory was 1960.<sup>43</sup> Three years later in 1963, Stone was listed as the manager of Thelma's Restaurant also known as Thelma's Café at 1047 Wayne Street.

Due to segregation, Black musicians, poets, and speakers who were part of the Chitlin Circuit stayed at Hotel Thelma. The Chitlin Circuit was a network of clubs, theaters, and venues where emerging and established Black jazz and pop musicians performed between the 1930s and 1960s. Stops were primarily located in southern United States cities but extended as far north as Boston, Massachusetts and west to Texas.<sup>44</sup> Bluefield was one of the major stops on this circuit. Artists including Sam Cooke, Etta James, Little Richard, James Brown and Ike and Tina Turner performed at the Bluefield Auditorium on Stadium Drive. The dance floor was reserved for Black people while the balcony was open to whites. Bluefield was also home to one of the major Black promoters of the Chitlin Circuit, Ralph Weinberg.<sup>45</sup> Weinberg was originally from Baltimore, Maryland and migrated to Bluefield in 1923 with his wife Ida. He brought some of the best performers to Bluefield including Fats Domino and Duke Ellington.<sup>46</sup>

Thelma Stone resided on the second floor of Hotel Thelma in a spacious, three-bedroom apartment until her death in 1981. She raised her niece Carolyn Foster Bailey Lewis, the first Black woman to graduate from West Virginia University with a degree in journalism<sup>47</sup> and manage a full-service public television station.<sup>48</sup> Hotel Thelma remained open for a few years before closing in the mid-1980s. Stone left the property to her niece Carolyn Foster Bailey in her will. Carolyn Lewis and her husband Robert Lewis

<sup>39</sup> "License Payment Date is Extended," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, 1 August 1934. Page 3

<sup>40</sup> "Colored News," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 30 August 1949. Page 5.

<sup>41</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 287. Flat Top National Bank to Thelma Stone. 15 March 1947. Page 415

<sup>42</sup> Advertisement. *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. November 24, 1949. Page 9

<sup>43</sup> Polk's Bluefield City Directory, 1960, page 268.

<sup>44</sup> Roland Martin and Rene Ostberg, "Chitlin Circuit," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 17, 2024, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chitlin-circuit>.

<sup>45</sup> Lauterbach, Preston, *The Chitlin' Circuit and the Road to Rock 'n' Roll*, page 10.

<sup>46</sup> Archer, William, "Ralph Weinberg," *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, December 9, 2015, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/966>.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, Carolyn Foster Bailey. Resume.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

owned Hotel Thelma until 1991 when they sold it to James and Carol Wade.<sup>49</sup> Five years later in 1996, the Wades sold the Hotel Thelma building to the current owners Trustees of the Infirmity Prayer Service of Bluefield, West Virginia.<sup>50</sup>

The location of Hotel Thelma and Travelers' Inn Hotel proved convenient for travelers as automobile use increased. By the early 1960s, four major roads: US 52, US 19, US 21, and US 460 led into Bluefield from four directions. Prior to US 460's realignment and upgrade to four lanes in 1977, US 19, US 21 and US 460 all ran together on Princeton Avenue through downtown Bluefield. As Grant Street remained one of the few crossings of the N&W rail yard from downtown to the North Side/East End, the hotels' location one block east of Grant was not far from these major thoroughfares.

### **Ethnic Heritage/Black**

Bluefield, West Virginia was home to a large Black population in the early to mid-twentieth century. The majority of Black men found work with the N&W Railroad while a smaller number established businesses. In the early twentieth century, segregation resulted in Black people creating a community within a community. Separate schools, churches, institutions, and businesses were established in and near the downtown commercial district as well as in the North Side and East End neighborhoods. Black people living in Bluefield supported Black operated businesses including restaurants and drug stores. Although the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. the Board of Education* brought changes to Bluefield, the integration of schools and businesses was slow. Hotel Thelma and the Travelers' Inn Hotel were significant community and social centers for the Black population of Bluefield. The Bluefield Green Book Historic District represents Bluefield's thriving Black culture in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and is significant under Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Black.

### **Transportation**

The Bluefield Green Book Historic District is significant under Criterion A in the area of Transportation for its association with Black automobile travel in the early to mid-twentieth century. As automobiles became more popular, Americans had more freedom to travel longer distances. This was especially true for Black travelers who experienced widespread discrimination in modes of transportation such as railroads and streetcars. However, while white Americans had numerous options for lodging, dining, and services, Black travelers were limited in the places they could stay. During segregation, Black travelers utilized *The Negro Motorist Green Book* to identify safe Black-operated and Black-friendly businesses in cities across the United States. Two of the Black operated hotels, Hotel Thelma and the Travelers Hotel, were located next to each other in Bluefield's East End in a location convenient to major highways. These properties represent the unique Black experience of automobile transportation in the early- to mid-twentieth century, both the increased freedom it offered and the accompanying challenges and dangers.

---

<sup>49</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 716. Carolyn Foster Bailey Lewis to James and Carol Wade. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. Page 660.

<sup>50</sup> Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 768. James and Carol Wade to Fernnell Dowell, Vernon Walton, Barbara G. Lewis, and Carol Wade, Trustees of Infirmity Prayer Service of Bluefield, West Virginia. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. Page 263

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Social History/The Negro Motorist Green Book**

*The Negro Motorist Green Book* was a travel guide utilized by Black people during segregation. Bluefield had five Black-operated businesses listed in the *Green Book*: the Traveler's Inn (Travelers Hotel) on Raleigh Street, Kingslow's Drug Store and the Hub restaurant on Bland Street and Hotel Thelma and the Traveler's Inn Hotel (Travelers Hotel) on Wayne Street. Hotel Thelma and the Traveler's Inn Hotel make up the Bluefield Green Book Historic District. This district is significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its association with *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. The hotels are important links to the segregation era during which Black travelers had to carefully plan trips or risk harassment and violence. Both hotels also featured a restaurant where Black residents could frequent and eat a home cooked meal. Hotel Thelma housed emerging Black musicians including Ike and Tina Turner, James Brown, and Little Richard when they stopped in Bluefield as part of the Chitlin Circuit.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

1963-64 *Third Annual Report of the West Virginia Human Rights Commission*. Charleston, West Virginia: 1964. <https://hrc.wv.gov/about/Documents/Annual%20Report%201964-1963.pdf>  
Accessed 7 March 2024.

"Appalachian Power Company Making Many Improvements." *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. Section 5, page 21. October 5, 1913. <https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-oct-05-1913-p-21/>  
Accessed 7 March 2024.

Archer, William R. "Ralph Weinberg." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 9 December 2015. Web.  
Accessed 11 April 2024.

"Bluefield Placed on U. S. Route 19 by Road Bureau," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. Volume XXXIV, No. 280. 18 November 1926. page 1. <https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-nov-18-1926-p-1/>. Accessed 4 January 2024.

"Bluefield State College Phys Ed Building Ripped By Explosion," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 22 November 1968. Page 1. <https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-nov-22-1968-p-1/>  
Accessed 9 February 2024.

"Colored News," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 30 August 1949. Page 5.  
<https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-aug-30-1949-p-6/> Accessed 27 November 2023.

Currence, Stubby. "New Buses Will Replace Princeton Trolleys By Middle of the Month," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. Page 2. 5 February 1947. <https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-feb-05-1947-p-2/>

"Dorms are Evacuated for Bomb Scare at BSC" *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 17 November 1968. Page 1. <https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-nov-17-1968-p-85/> Accessed 9 February 2024.

Elswick, Sarah and Courtney Zimmerman. *Green Book Sites in West Virginia*. Multiple Property Documentation Form. March 2024.

"The Last N&W Passenger Train Leaving Roanoke Was Steam-Powered." Roanoke Star. 14 April 2021. <https://theroanokestar.com/2021/04/14/the-last-nw-passenger-train-leaving-roanoke-was-steam-powered/> Accessed 15 March 2024.

Lauterbach, Preston. *The Chitlin' Circuit and the Road to Rock 'n' Roll*. W. M. Norton & Company, New York: 2011.

"License Payment Date is Extended." *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 1 August 1934. Page 3

Lewis, Carolyn Foster Bailey, "Lessons Learned Traveling with 'The Green Book': Bluefield's Hotel Thelma Belonged to my Aunt," *Black By God*. 18 March 2023.  
<https://blackbygod.org/articles/community-and-culture/memory-green-book-story-lewis/>

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

"Markers Erected to State Line South Gate," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 4 December 1927, Section 2 p 11.

McGehee, C. Stuart "Bluefield." *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia*. 10 February 2023. Web. 30 October 2023.

McGhee, Stuart. *Bluefield, West Virginia, 1889-1989: Centennial History*. City of Bluefield, West Virginia: 1990.

Meador, Michael. M. "Carving a Niche: The Blacks of Bluefield." *Goldenseal*. Volume 119, Number 4. Winter 1987.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 25. Joseph I Doran and Ida W. Doran to the Bluefield Water Works and Improvement Company. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 2 May 1891. Page 8.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 319. J. E. Wagner J to Alma Florence. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 30 March 1951. Page 107.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 242. R. L. Brooks to Rosie Webb. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 6 September 1939. Page 39.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 287. Flat Top National Bank to Thelma Stone. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 15 March 1947. Page 415.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 457. Alma C. Florence Scales to Carolyn Foster Bailey. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 14 November 1969. Page 473.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 716. Carolyn Foster Bailey Lewis to James and Carol Wade. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 31 October 1991. Page 660.

Mercer County Clerk. Deed Book 768. James and Carol Wade to Fernnell Dowell, Vernon Walton, Barbara G. Lewis, and Carol Wade, Trustees of Infirmity Prayer Service of Bluefield, West Virginia. Office of the County Clerk. City of Princeton. 14 February 1996.

"Much Interest is Manifested in Nursery," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. 25 December 1937. Page 13.  
<https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-dec-25-1937-p-13/>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1940. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/dc858e50-83d3-0132-2266-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1949. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9dc3ff40-8df4-0132-fd57-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1950. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/283a7180-87c6-0132-13e6-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1951. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/51514e90-856e-0132-01a0-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1952. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/42c15a10-92c7-0132-cf89-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1953. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/2bc86d90-92d0-0132-e771-58d385a7b928>

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1954. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/3c85ba30-9374-0132-9292-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1955. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/2a146d30-9381-0132-f916-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1956. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9c454830-83b9-0132-d56a-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1957. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/089a5a60-848f-0132-a7aa-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1958. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/89ed7cc0-8486-0132-e7b6-58d385a7bbd0>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1960. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a7bf74e0-9427-0132-17bf-58d385a7b928>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1961. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5ae34320-942e-0132-7630-58d385a7bbd0>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1962. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/786175a0-942e-0132-97b0-58d385a7bbd0>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1963-1964. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/666fe280-82ee-0132-31f3-58d385a7bbd0>

*The Negro Motorist Green Book*. New York: V.H. Green, 1966. Accessed online at New York Public Library. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/27516920-8308-0132-5063-58d385a7bbd0>

“Notice of Dissolution” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. Page 7. February 17, 1916.  
<https://newspaperarchive.com/bluefield-daily-telegraph-feb-17-1916-p-7/> Accessed 31 October 2023.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1912-1913*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1912.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1919-1920*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1919.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1942*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1942.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1952*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1952.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1954*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1954.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1955*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1955.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1956-1957*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1956.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1958-1959*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1958.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1960*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1960.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1961*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1961.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1963*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1963.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1964*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1964.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1965*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1965.

*Polk's Bluefield City Directory for 1967*. R. L. Polk & Co. Publishers, Pittsburg Pennsylvania: 1967.

Rankin, John R. *The Early History and Development of Bluefield, West Virginia*. Radford, Virginia, Commonwealth Press, Inc.: 1976.

Martin, Roland and Ostberg, René. "Chitlin Circuit". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 17 January 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/chitlin-circuit>. Accessed 11 April 2024.

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia*. Sanborn Map Company, January 1907. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390\\_004/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390_004/).

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia*. Sanborn Map Company, October 1910. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390\\_005/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390_005/).

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia*. Sanborn Map Company, January 1914. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390\\_006/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390_006/).

*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia*. Sanborn Map Company, December 1922. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390\\_007/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn09390_007/).

"Travelers Hotel." Advertisement. *The McDowell Times*. 27 March 1936, page 2.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86092050/1936-03-27/ed-1/seq-2/#date1=1913&index=8&date2=1963&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&lccn=sn86092050&words=Hotel+HOTEL&proxdistance=5&state=West+Virginia&rows=20&ortext=&proxttext=&phrasetext=&andtext=hotel+&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1> Accessed 30 October 2023.

WV Division of Highways. "East End & North Side African American Historic Sites." Story Map.

<https://gis.transportation.wv.gov/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/a91a019da6f24766a2a9108623d54f4d?fbclid=IwAR1zDUZfprGQ0ZXQqUV0PLM3kH-FuN0ihxsG7H0dr5dp3WXWWoHMNGpKeWY>. Accessed 7 March 2024.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☒ University  
☒ Other

Name of repository: Craft Memorial Library, 600 Commerce Street, Bluefield,  
West Virginia

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** MC-2030 and MC-2031

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.476

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude:	Longitude:
2. Latitude:	Longitude:
3. Latitude:	Longitude:
4. Latitude:	Longitude:

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

Or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

- |              |                  |                     |
|--------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Zone: 17N | Easting: 480,784 | Northing: 4,125,274 |
| 2. Zone:     | Easting: 480,826 | Northing: 4,125,293 |
| 3. Zone:     | Easting: 480,846 | Northing: 4,125,249 |
| 4. Zone:     | Easting: 480,804 | Northing: 4,125,230 |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries for the Bluefield Green Book Historic District are as follows: The southern boundary is the edge of pavement of Wayne Street. The eastern boundary is the edge of pavement of Logan Street. The western boundary is designated as the western edge of Tax Parcel 11-125, extended to meet the edge of pavement of Wayne Street. The north boundary is designated as the northern edge of Tax Parcels 11-123, 11-124 and 11-125, extended to meet the edge of pavement of Logan Street.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The selected boundaries encompass the tax parcels containing the two properties and the intervening vacant lot, as well additional strips of land along the front and sides of the parcels within the rights-of-way of Wayne and Logan Streets. Although the parcel boundaries are tight against the front and sides of the buildings, the portions of land within the street rights-of-way historically form a front and side yard for the properties and thus are included in the historic boundary.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Sarah Elswick and Courtney Zimmerman, Architectural Historians  
organization: Aurora Research Associates, LLC  
street & number: 1436 Graham Road  
city or town: Silver Lake state: OH zip code: 44224  
e-mail sarah@aurora-llc.com courtney@aurora-llc.com  
telephone: 304-685-7410  
date: March 8, 2024

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

---

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Figure 1: Excerpt of the 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing Wayne Street

Figure 2: Excerpt of the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

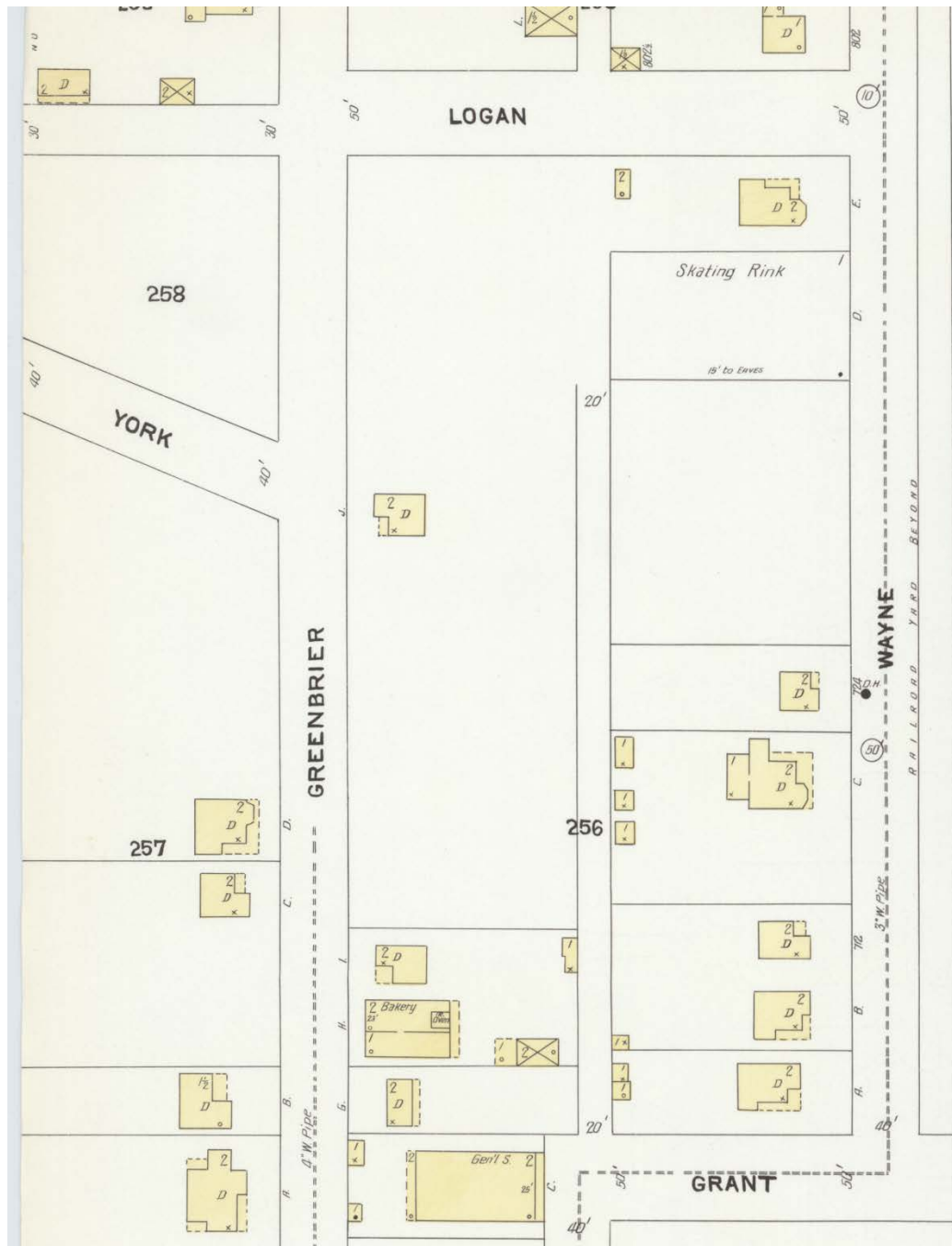


Figure 1: Excerpt from the 1907 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Library of Congress

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

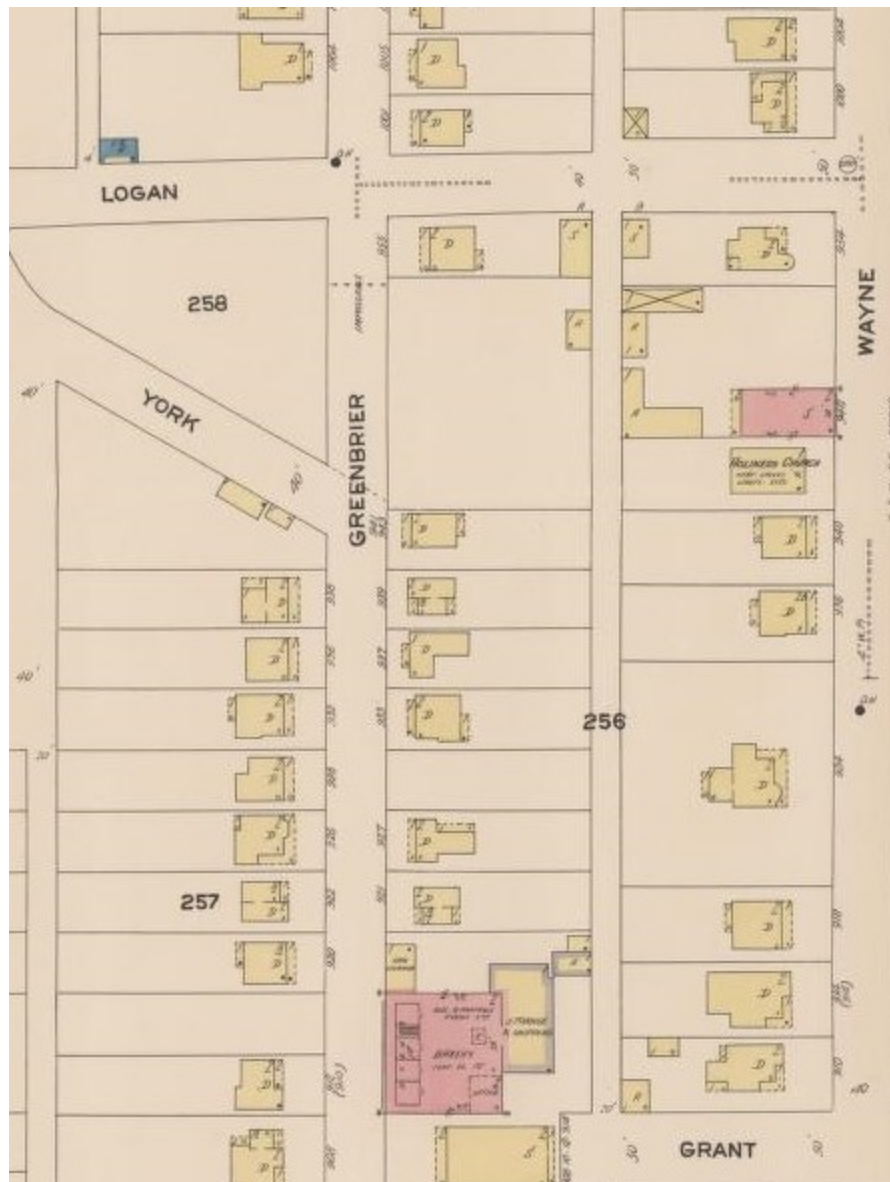


Figure 2: Excerpt from the 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Library of Congress

Bluefield Green Book Historic District

Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia

County and State

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel

City or Vicinity: Bluefield

County: Mercer

State: WV

Photographer: Sarah Elswick

Date Photographed: September 1, 2023, March 23, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1: Street view of Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel, camera pointing northwest

Photo 2: Street view of Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel, camera pointing northeast

Photo 3: Front (south) elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing northwest

Photo 4: West elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera facing east

Photo 5: Rear (north) elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing south

Photo 6: Side (east) and rear (north) view of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing southwest

Photo 7: Oblique view of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing northwest

Photo 8: Hotel Thelma window on front elevation, camera pointing north

Photo 9: Front (south) elevation of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera facing north

Photo 10: East elevation of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera pointing west

Photo 11: Oblique of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera pointing northeast

Photo 12: View of the grassy lot between the two hotels, camera pointing north

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 1: Street view of Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel, camera pointing northwest.



Photo 2: Street view of Hotel Thelma and Traveler's Inn Hotel, camera pointing northeast.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 3: Front (south) elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing northwest.



Photo 4: West elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera facing east.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 5: Rear (north) elevation of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing south.



Photo 6: Side (east) and rear (north) view of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing southwest.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 7: Oblique view of Hotel Thelma, camera pointing northwest.



Photo 8: Hotel Thelma window on front elevation, camera pointing north.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 9: Front (south) elevation of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera facing north.



Photo 10: East elevation of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera pointing west.



Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State



Photo 11: Oblique of Travelers Inn Hotel, camera pointing northeast.



Photo 12: View of the grassy lot between the two hotels, camera pointing north.

Bluefield Green Book Historic District  
Name of Property

Mercer, West Virginia  
County and State

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours  
Tier 2 – 120 hours  
Tier 3 – 230 hours  
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.