

East End Bluefield

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORIC SITES

Walking Tour

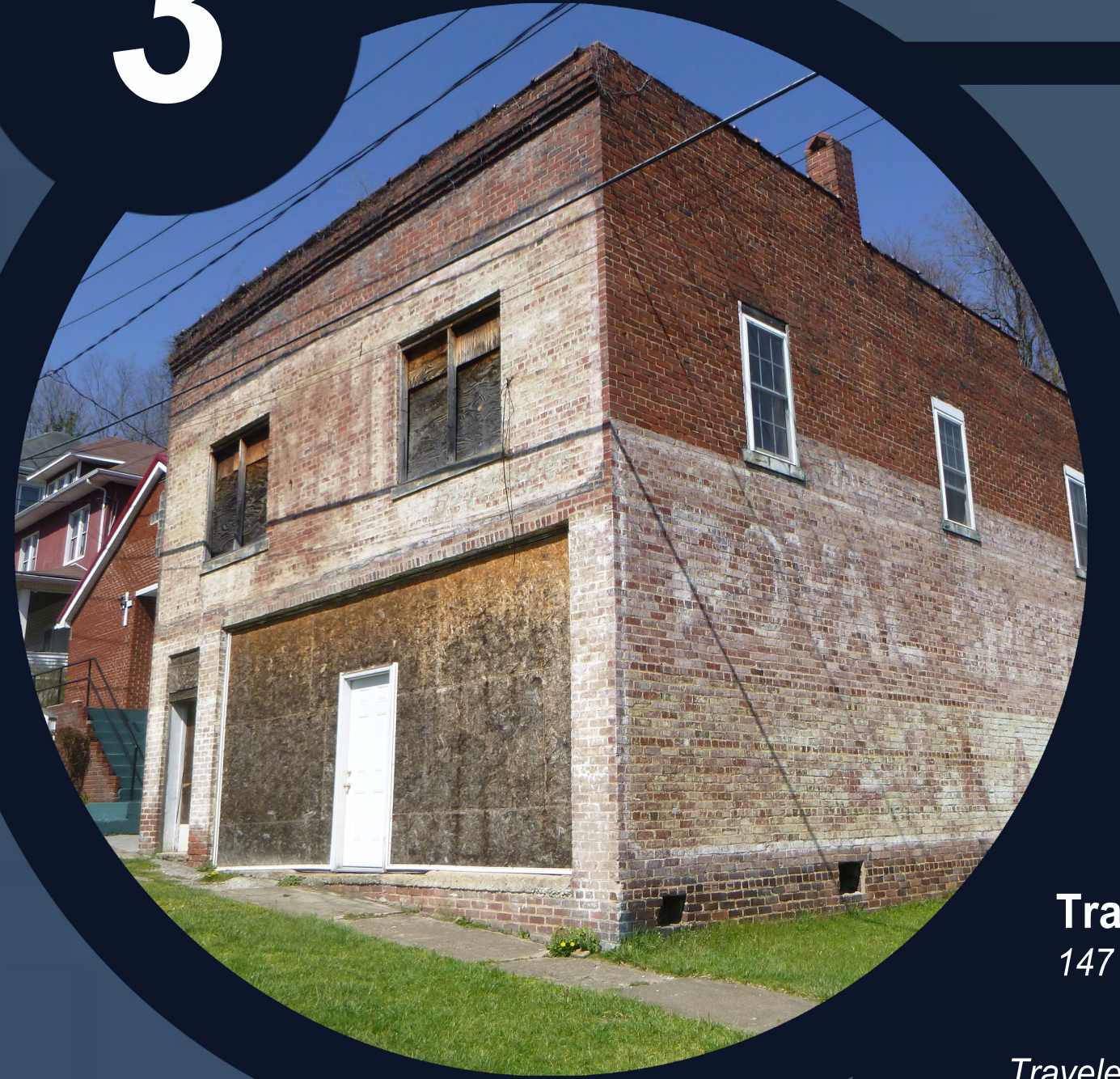
2



Hotel Thelma
1509 Logan Street

Hotel Thelma is located on the northwestern corner of Wayne and Logan Streets in Bluefield. The two-story building of concrete block with glass block windows had a restaurant on the first floor. Guest rooms and apartments were on the second floor. Opened in 1949, the hotel was owned and operated by Thelma Stone, a local restaurateur. The Hotel Thelma was listed in the Green Book, a guide for African American travelers during the Jim Crow era. Besides welcoming out-of-town guests, the Hotel Thelma was also a community gathering place. Hotel Thelma hosted musical luminaries such as James Brown, Sam Cooke, Etta James, Little Richard, and other artists playing on the "Chitlin' Circuit", a network of African-American venues and clubs during the Jim Crow era.

3



Traveler's Inn
147 Wayne Street

Traveler's Inn is located on Wayne Street next to Hotel Thelma.

4



Hancock Elementary School
209 Henry Street

Hancock Elementary School was built in 1925. The one-story school is built of yellow brick and the building had five classrooms. The school is on a slightly less than one acre lot and is surrounded by a partially paved schoolyard. Although integration became the law of the land when the Supreme Court decided Brown Vs. the Board of Education in 1954, the integration of the school systems in West Virginia was not instantaneous. Hancock Elementary remained open until 1970, when the Mercer County School Board voted to close Hancock Elementary and the 125 students attending the school were compelled to enroll at Wade Elementary, a large school on the south side of the rail yard. The building was bought by the First AME Zion Church and converted to apartments in 1974.

1



Grant Street Bridge (replaced)
Grant Street over Norfolk Southern Railway

The Grant Street Bridge was built in 1941 by the Virginia Bridge Company of Roanoke Virginia. It is a two-span, riveted-plate Warren through truss bridge. The overall length of the structure was 320 feet, with an overall width of 20 feet, excluding the pedestrian walkway along the northeast elevation. The structure consisted of trusses that were connected by riveted floor beams, sway struts, and upper and lower laterals. It had a metal grid deck, and the pedestrian walkway with wooden floor beams. The bridge was supported at each end by stone and concrete abutments and intermittently by two reinforced concrete open-bent type piers. The bridge carried Grant Street over the Norfolk Southern railyard, connecting the residential neighborhood known as the East End to the north of the railyard to the downtown commercial center of Bluefield located to the south of the railyard. The first bridge in this location was built around 1903. That bridge collapsed under the weight of an overloaded truck in September of 1940, leading to a protracted negotiation between the City of Bluefield and the Norfolk & Western Railroad over the responsibility and expense of replacing and maintaining the bridge. It was eventually agreed that the N&W would fully fund the construction of the new bridge and that the railway would maintain the superstructure and abutments while the city was responsible for maintaining the timber deck, roadway, sidewalk, handrails, and installing and maintaining load limit signs. Work got underway in March of 1941, and the piers and abutments were completed in May. The delivery of steel to complete the bridge was delayed over the summer as the Norfolk & Western and the Virginia Bridge Company prioritized defense contracts, but the bridge was opened to pedestrian traffic on October 5, and finally to vehicle traffic on October 20, 1941. Due to structural deficiencies, the bridge was closed to all traffic in 2019 and replaced by the West Virginia Division of Highways in 2022.

