CONTINUED FROM J1

if you go into a second-class place you get insulted and trouble is sure to follow.”

The request was denied amid concerns there were too many saloons. But a few years later, in 1911, Barnett entered the hotel business as proprietor of the Stanford House at 111-113 Commerce Ave, SW.

Also during this time, the city’s black population was growing.

In 1900, a little more than 600 blacks lived in the city, less than 1 percent of the population. By 1920, during the first wave of the Great Migration of blacks from the South, the black population in Grand Rapids grew to 1,090.

Blacks came from the South looking for work. Some came as porters on the railroad.

Others made their way into the restaurant industry as waiters.

The Waldron Building became Williams Hotel in 1926, owned by a black family from Chicago, according to Jelks. But by 1932, the Waldron would fall vacant.

The black community continued to grow and by 1940 about 2,600 blacks were living in Grand Rapids. That number swelled to 6,937 by 1950, making up nearly 3 percent of the total population.

Barnett continued his business ventures and opened Billiards and Barber at 104 Ionia SW. In 1935, the Waldron remained vacant.

In 1939, the Waldron reopened as the Philadelphia Hotel.

Four years later it was Barnett’s Hotel, owned by Stanley Barnett.

Barnett returned to City Hall in 1939 to request the transfer of a liquor license to Barnett’s. This time it was approved.

In 1940, Barnett’s was where patrons could find a clean room with a double bed, good food and warm hospitality.

“The town was highly prejudiced and segregated.”

Raspberry recalled, “I remember being turned down at a restaurant on Division Avenue and we couldn’t just check into the Pantlind (Hotel).”

At Barnett’s 30-room hotel, with 15 rooms each on the second and third floors, check-in was assured. The bar and restaurant on the first level were welcoming.

Jazz musicians who played at Barnett’s got a room there. So would actors who came in town for shows at the Civic Theatre.

Jim “Legend” Rhodes, local Realtor, recalls Barnett’s as the place where everybody, no matter what color, could come and feel welcome.

“You had dignitaries and entrepreneurs sitting together,” Rhodes said. “It was the premier bar.

Some people had fancy cars and people who didn’t have fancy cars took a cab, ’cause you had to get there.”

Barnett died in 1947, at age 68. His son, Stanley, Jr. took over running Barnett’s.

When he died in the mid-1950s Alphonse Lewis Jr. assumed management duties. By 1959, the club was bringing in live entertainment.

Union Station was demolished that year; the hotel was closed by then.

But people kept coming to Barnett’s. Lewis opened the bar at midnight on Sundays and people packed in to hear Sonny Cox, the Prince James Trio and Benny Carew.

“The town was highly prejudiced and segregated.”

There was never dancing, because another license was required for that.

But there was plenty of music.

Beer and whiskey were a quarter.

The Saturday cover charge was $1. and that included a drink.

Barnett’s was open seven days a week. Lewis’ sister bought the property in 1961.

Lewis keeps a file of photos of the acts he brought in.

“I’ll be darned, this is Hank Jones, a piano player,” Lewis said

almost to himself. “He was good. I haven’t seen him in ages. The club really jumped then.

“I had always known about Barnett’s; it was the spot,” he reminisced.

Curtis Purnell, 76, was one of the last musicians to perform at Barnett’s in 1963.

“It was a place where black people could go and feel comfortable,” said Purnell, who still plays his saxophone professionally. “Some musicians came to sit in with the band; there was all kinds of music, but it featured jazz.”

When Barnett’s closed, it left a void, said Rhodes. “In fact, we need another bar like that.”

In 1940, Barnett’s was where patrons could find a clean room with a double bed, good food and warm hospitality.

PRESS PHOTO: WENDE ALEXANDER CLARK

Ted Raspberry, former patron of Barnett’s, stands in front of the Ionia Avenue SW building that is being renovated.