

# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



## Marcenia Lyle "Toni" Stone (July 17, 1921 – November 2, 1996)

### "First Black Woman Pioneer in the Negro League Professional Baseball"

**Toni Stone** was born as Marcenia Lyle "Toni" Stone, on July 17, 1921 in Bluefield, West Virginia. Her parents moved the family to St. Paul, Minnesota when she was ten years old. As a child, Toni leaned toward more activities that were more often identified with boys, such as baseball and track & field. She earned the nickname of "Tomboy". Her love of sport was so concerning to her parents, that her father contacted a local priest to talk her out of playing baseball. Instead of trying to deter young Toni, the priest invited her to play with his team little league team, the St. Peter Cleavers. Toni attended Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis but dropped out by the age of fifteen. She first played second base with the all-male Twin Cities Colored Giants semi-pro team, a local barnstorming club that traveled around the Midwest and Canada.

During the 1936-1937 season, Toni worked out with the St. Paul Saints of the American Baseball Association. In 1937, she moved to the California Bay Area, working odd jobs to care for her sister until 1946. While in San Francisco, Toni played for the American Legion Team and the San Francisco Sea Lions in the West Coast Negro Baseball League, making about \$200 to \$300 a month. In 1949, she played a season with the New Orleans Creoles but left to play with the Black Pelicans, another Louisiana team.

In 1950, at the age of 29 and under pressure to conform to the societal "norms", Toni married 69-year-old, Aurelius Alberga. Unsurprisingly, her new husband did not approve of her playing baseball.

In 1953, Toni signed with the Indianapolis Clowns as a second-baseman, making her the first woman to play professional ball with the Negro League. The newspapers claimed that attendance at Clowns' games hit record levels when Toni started playing. Her image was used on the team's promotional materials to sell tickets, even though some male players continued to shun her.

While playing in the Negro Leagues, Toni was knocked down by pitchers, taken out on double plays by baserunners, and generally treated the same as male ballplayers while on the field. She wasn't given a locker room and often had to change in the umpire's locker room. The highlight of her career was hitting a single run off pitcher Satchel Paige. Toni appeared in fifty games in her first season but was traded during the off-season to the Kansas City Monarchs. After the 1953-1954 season with the Monarchs, Toni retired from professional baseball, with a batting average of .243. She proudly displayed the scars on her left wrist, from a runner that spiked her on 2nd base.

In 1990, St. Paul, Minnesota, declared March 6 "Toni Stone Day". In 1996, the city named a baseball field in her honor. Toni Stone Field is in the Dunning Baseball Complex, near the neighborhood where Toni grew up. She was inducted into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1993 and posthumously inducted into the Minnesota Sports Hall of Fame in 2021.

Toni cared for her husband until his death in 1987. On November 2, 1996, Marcenia "Toni" Stone, died of heart failure in Oakland, California. She was 75 years old.

On June 20, 2019, the world premiere of the stage play, *Toni Stone*, opened at Roundabout Theatre Company's, Laura Pels Theatre, in New York. The play is based on the book *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by author Martha Ackmann.

*Toni Stone*

