



THE STEEN'S MOTEL
913 Manning Street
Site Medallion No. 57

At first glance, Steen's Motel seems out of place in the middle of a residential street in Dalworth.

But this tiny motel at 913 Manning Street makes perfect sense when set against the historical backdrop of segregation. African-Americans' access to white-owned businesses was restricted, if not completely denied, when Steen's opened in 1959. That forced black entrepreneurs like Bobby Steen to open businesses within African-American neighborhoods.

With little previous construction experience, Mr. Steen designed and built the motel himself at the young age of 27. The rectangle of a building features a long central hall off which nine guest rooms open. The rooms do not have private baths, but rather patrons walk down the hall to the restrooms /showers built along the hallway. A community kitchen /dining room with a washer and drier sits at one end of the building. Across the parking lot Mr. Steen built his own apartment in the same style as the motel. All are connected with covered parking to create a U shaped complex. On the north side of the property, a covered patio area with seating, grills and a pond create an outdoor area for tenants.

Mr. Steen keeps the property and facility pristine, but otherwise has made no renovations other than regular upkeep. Immaculately landscaped, the motel feels more like a home than a place to stay overnight. In fact, many of the folks who stay at the motel have been there for years.

"We had one lady who lived here for four years. Another for 11," Mr. Steen said. "We've had some very loyal customers. "They keep in touch and send Christmas cards just like family."

The Steen's Motel is one of the last black-owned businesses in Dalworth, a community settled by African-Americans at the turn of the century. The motel survived the famine African-American-owned businesses experienced when integration opened up a world of choices to blacks.

“African-Americans were prevented from going to not just lunch counters, water fountains and restrooms, but also hotels, dry cleaners, hairdressers, you name it—all sort of things having to do with people’s everyday lives,” said David Bositis, a senior political analyst for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C. think tank. “All of a sudden, when integration began, African-Americans could go wherever they wanted.”

Mr. Steen says that integration did not hurt his motel business. He says customer loyalty has kept his place afloat while other black-owned businesses failed.

In its heyday, Dalworth boasted its own swimming pool, movie theater, post office and school. Doctors, dentists and lawyers had offices on nearly every street in the community. In the years following integration, the once vibrant, close-knit community started to decline as people moved away and businesses went belly up.

“All of a sudden black consumers didn’t have to go out of their way. Before integration, black people knew they could stay only at a black motel or whatever business we’re talking about,” Dr. Bositis said. “Things changed, and it wasn’t like you could expect that every black person on the highway was going to stay at your motel anymore.”

Even into the 1970s, businesses in Dalworth thrived. The strong commercial climate began to dwindle during the 1980s. As jobs were lost, young people and the middle class moved away. Crime also began to escalate. By the 1990s, parts of Dalworth were plagued with drug sales and prostitution. Mr. Steen said he has worked hard to keep drug pushers off his property, located a few blocks from Tyre Park.

At its peak, the tidy red-and-white motel was a home away from home for many African Americans passing through the D/FW area, including migrant work crews, men and women in the armed services and even some famous people. There is talk that the Harlem Globetrotters and the Temptations stayed at Steen’s while making appearances in Dallas in the late 1950’s because it was the closest black motel.

Adapted from a Arlington Morning News article by Jennie Smith, February 19, 2001