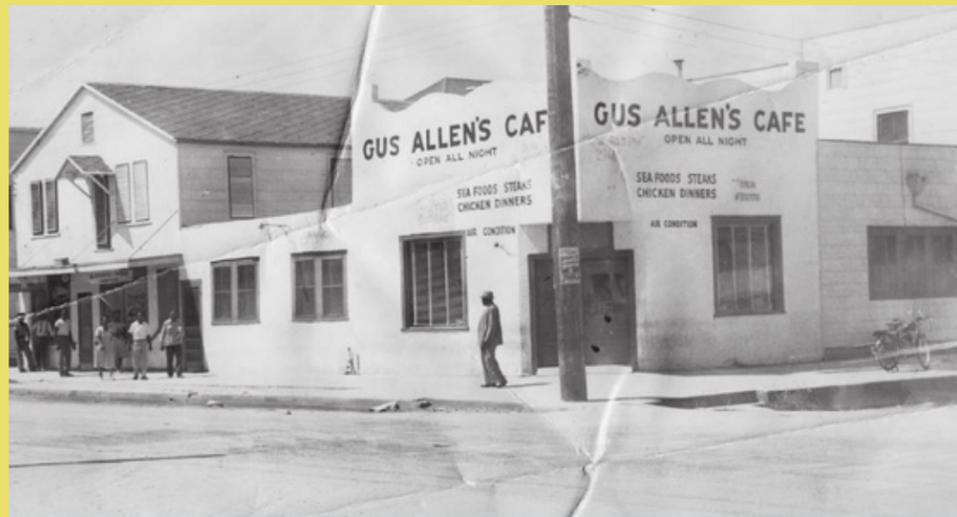


Gus Allen and African-American Travel in the Jim Crow Era

Andrew August "Gus" Allen, Sr. (1905–1988), an African-American native of Leesville, Louisiana, moved to Galveston in the late 1920s.²³³ As a resident for 60 years, he became owner and operator of Gus Allen Enterprises.²³⁴ Allen's travel-related business endeavors helped to foster travel for African-Americans along the Meridian Highway in Galveston.

Several of Allen's businesses were located on Church Street, two blocks north of the Meridian Highway (present-day Broadway Avenue). Gus Allen's Café opened on the corner of Church and 27th streets in the early 1940s (Figure 87 below).²³⁵ At the café, the Allens and their staff not only catered to black travelers, but also served famous guests such as boxer Joe Louis and musicians Lionel Hampton and Ivory Joe Hunter.²³⁶ Across the street, Allen operated the Gus Allen Hotel at 2711 Church Street (Figures 88 and 89 on the right). The hotel featured prominently in race-related travel guidebooks such as the *Negro Green Book* from 1949–1961. On the lower level, the hotel included a barber shop and store to the left and right of the lobby entry respectively. Gus Allen advertisements for wait staff, cooks, and barbers appear in 1940s and 1950s issues of the *Galveston Daily News*. In addition to fostering his own success and serving African Americans at a time when their dining, lodging, and travel options were limited, Allen's café and hotel on Church Street were a catalyst for other black-owned businesses. Allen supported establishments such as Honeybrown Restaurant, opened at 2728 Church Street in 1946, which was among a number of other boarding houses and restaurants in the vicinity as shown on historic maps.²³⁷



In 1965, the Gus Allen Villa and Café opened adjacent to Seawall Boulevard at 2820 Avenue R 1/2. Allen sought to capitalize on additional travel- and tourist-related opportunities with this later endeavor. The villa and café were among a small number of African-American-owned beachfront businesses grouped in the 2800 block of Seawall Boulevard. Although a hallmark of segregation, these businesses prospered and were very popular, and "...in this one block many great memories were formed. People came from all over the world to stay at Gus Allen's Villa, eat at the Jambalaya Restaurant or dance at the Manhattan Club. Gus Allen, an astute businessman, owned [both] the Jambalaya and Villa locations."²³⁸ The popularity of the two businesses and the fare they served were highlighted in a June 1969 issue of *Ebony* magazine.²³⁹

Figure 87. (ABOVE) Gus Allen Café at 2702–2704 Church Street (corner of 27th Street). Source: Tommie D. Boudreaux and Alice M. Gatson, *African Americans of Galveston* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), p. 34.

Gus Allen died in 1988, having served on various civic, social, and charitable organizations on the national, state, and local levels.²⁴⁰ Although none of his businesses are extant, his legacy remains. Gus Allen, Sr. Park occupies a portion of the 2700 block of Church Street that was once occupied by Allen's former properties.²⁴¹

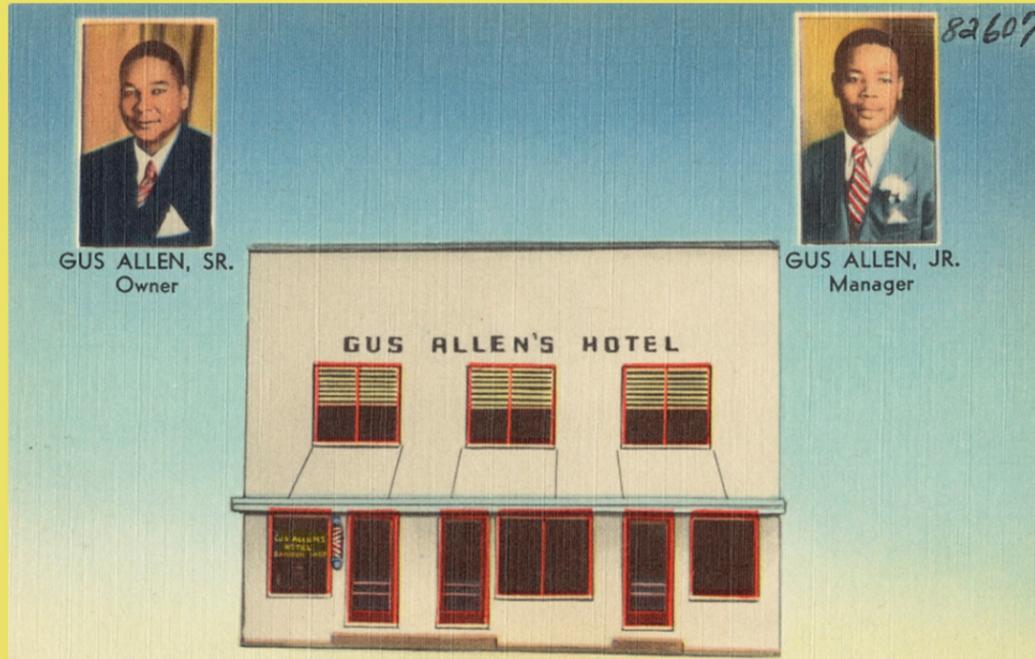


Figure 88. Historic postcard depicting Allen, his son, and their hotel on Church Street. Source: Print Department, Boston Public Library, <http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/zk51vw44j> (accessed February 26, 2016).



Figure 89. Gus Allen (seated third from left) with staff of the Gus Allen Hotel located at 2711 Church Street. Source: Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.