



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

7-Eleven Store No. 55

Alexandria Times, July 8, 2010

Image: Store at West Glebe Road and Commonwealth Avenue. Photo, Ken Feil, Getty Images.

In the mid-1960s, Southland Corporation opened several new 7-Eleven convenience stores in Alexandria. Store No. 55 opened in 1965 at the corner of West Glebe Road and Commonwealth Avenue, but it closed down five years later after a violent incident there led to civil unrest.

On May 29, 1970, a white store employee shot and killed a black teenager inside the store, and claimed the young man had pulled a knife on him. Police arrested the employee and charged him with murder that night but he was soon released on bond.

A crowd gathered around the store and groups of people began expressing their anger by throwing rocks at nearby businesses and damaging cars. Vandals broke windows and set fires throughout the night. Five police officers were injured, and at least six people were arrested.

For the next three nights, during a time when race relations in the city were already strained, the unrest continued. Store No. 55 – seen boarded up in this photo -- and other 7-Elevens were targeted, but fire bombs also damaged other businesses throughout Alexandria. City officials enacted emergency measures, which banned the sale of guns, certain knives and gasoline in containers. Within the week, the disturbances subsided.

In mid-June, police stated the store employee admitted planting his own knife near the victim's body. Later that year, his trial ended in a hung jury. He later pleaded guilty to manslaughter and served less than a year in prison before being paroled. Store No. 55 never reopened, and the building became home to at least two churches. In the early 1970s, the People's Choice AME Zion Church moved in, and today the Freedom Way Missionary Baptist Church occupies the old 7-Eleven.



“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.