

PROJECT

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with J. A. Steele at
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J. A. Steele

Negroes of New York

Wilbur Young

Interview with J A Steele

Javan A Steele, the first Negro licensed master plumber in the city of New York came here in 1910 from Barbadoes, B.W.I. where he was born 68 years ago. He learned the plumbing trade in that country and worked in Trinidad and Parra, Brazil.

After taking out his citizenship papers, he secured a job at the Brooklyn Navy Yard where he worked as a skilled plumber. In 1922, he took a city examination for his plumbing license. He was the only Negro among 125 applicants and one out of the 25 that passed. After securing his license, he went into business for himself and at one time had a crew of 18 men working under him.

Some of the jobs that he contracted and completed was Rev. Lawson's Pentecostal church at 133rd Street between 5th and Lenox Avenues, and Abyssinia Baptist church on 138th Street.

In May, 1931, he was appointed city Marshall under Mayor O'Brien in which capacity he served for four years. Upon completion of his term of office, he returned to his own private plumbing business. His successor as city Marshall was another Steele, J. Dalmus, no relation.

Mr Steele has three children the eldest being Dr. Frank E. Steele, a specialist in venereal deseases at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, the other two, Dorothy and Harvey are students at Bennett college and Tuskegee Institute respectively.

J.A. Steele is an active member of the Elks, Masons and was one of the directors of the United Mutual Insurance Company. His wife Florence, also a native of Barbadoes, B.W.L. died four years ago.