

Memphis Motel Where King Shot Is Sold

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MEMPHIS, Dec. 13.—The Lorraine Motel, site of the 1968 assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was purchased today by a group that says it plans to use the property for an international civil rights museum and a shrine to King.

With the help of a last-minute \$50,000 loan guarantee, the Martin Luther King Memphis Memorial Foundation bought the motel for \$144,000 at a public auction at the Shelby County Courthouse, about a mile north of the assassination site.

King, a former Nobel Peace Prize winner, was shot to death on the balcony outside his Lorraine room on April 4, 1968, by James Earl Ray, who is serving a 99-year sentence for the killing.

A crowd of about 100 onlookers applauded when the sale was declared final.

"I feel terrific," said attorney D'Army Bailey, head of the foundation, admitting that he was worried that the property would be bought by someone who wanted to raze the structure and use it for commercial or speculative purposes.

Group Plans to Use Facility As a Museum and a Shrine

"This is a historic site," Bailey said of the Lorraine. "It's where Dr. King's journey ended. We now have an opportunity to make this a first-class shrine honoring a great warrior for freedom."

The auction was required after owner Walter Bailey, unrelated to D'Army Bailey, defaulted on mortgage payments. Four persons participated in the bidding, and two, who were not identified, dropped out before bids reached \$100,000.

Fred Sauer, owner of the first mortgage, bid \$143,000 but decided not to drive the price higher, although he said he will lose about \$30,000 on the auction.

"It's the best thing for the community and everyone involved," he said.

The \$50,000 loan was arranged through the Tri-State Bank of Memphis. Half of the loan is backed by the Memphis local of the American

Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which also donated \$25,000 for the shrine. The other half was backed by the Lucky Hearts Cosmetics Co., D'Army Bailey said.

"We got the bank commitment on the courthouse steps," he said.

The foundation plans to raise money to pay off the loan, then begin a nationwide campaign to raise several million dollars to build the shrine and museum.

The Lorraine is in a grimy area south of downtown Memphis. Many of the windows in surrounding buildings are pocked with holes or covered with shutters or iron bars.

Still, the Lorraine remains an attraction. Two or three dozen cars carrying the inquisitive of all races and from all parts of the world pass the motel on an average day, a motel clerk said.

For \$15 a night, one can still rent a room, except for the one occupied by King on the day he was killed, Room 306. Bailey said he does not expect the Lorraine to continue operating as a motel for more than a few weeks.

The clerk, who asked not to be identified, said an average of five or six rooms are occupied nightly.