

THE



WILTON

MANORS

STORY...

AS TOLD IN 1955

Many persons have noted sidewalks long laid and lamp posts on Wilton Drive, design of the twenties, and have been curious as to the background of Wilton Manors; when it was founded and how it derived its name. With the celebration of the re-building of Wilton Drive, your editor thought it timely to bring the history of Wilton Manors up to date and with the aid of early residents, Mr. Dave Turner, Mayor Perry Mickel, Alvar Hagen, Norman Malcolm, and the newspaper files of the former Wilton Manors Bulletin

(Tom Hinds, Editor) we have been able to piece together the following story.

The first deed on record involving present Wilton Manors was executed in 1890. It came about as a step in the romantic story of the reclamation of the mangrove swamps and sand dunes and their transformation into the present dream-come-true-land for tourists, and a wonderful place to live for the year 'round residents.

In the year 1881 a group of St. Augustine people headed by John Wescott, incorporated the Florida East Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company, capitalized at \$100,000 for the purpose of "Constructing, maintaining and operating a canal, or artificial waterway for the passage of boats and vessels, with the necessary locks, for public use in the conveyance of persons and property, to extend from some point near the head of Matanza River, in St. Johns County, southward to the head of the Halifax River" - a distance of about 12 miles. In 1882 the project was enlarged to extend the canal all the way to Biscayne Bay in Dade County. The canal was to permit passage of vessels drawing three feet of water or less.

In 1885 the Legislature made a grant of land to the canal company to make up deficiencies along its "present and proposed extended line" and in 1889 confirmed the grant of land to the company, at the rate of 3,840 acres per mile for the entire distance of 320 miles - St. Augustine to Biscayne Bay. The canal was to be 50 feet wide and 5 feet deep, at mean low water.

The Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida had, meantime, been designated as custodians of all swamp lands of the state. Thus it came about that the Trustees in 1890 issued the first deed to lands in Wilton Manors and other lands. The total was something over a million acres.

High hopes that the canal, which later became the Inland Water Way, would play an important part in developing the Southeast Coast, became partly true, but the coming of the railroad in 1895 pushed development rapidly. A railway station was located at Mahanna Road (now called NE 24 Street). It was called Colohatchee and was moved at a later date to Oakland Park where it sometime later burned to the ground.

Colohatchee is an Indian place-name of local origin, current before the railroad came. It is said that William C. Collier was the first white settler in this northeast section not long after Stranahan settled on New River. He had a rich little area along the South side of the North Fork of Middle River, east of the present railroad. He had an orange grove and the Indians developed quite a fondness for his oranges. They called him Colo, and Hatchee meant river, hence the location was Colohatchee--Collier at the River.

Stranahan and Frank Oliver were owners of land here in Wilton Manors. In fact, in 1910 Oliver, Moody and Weaver platted the land lying between the railroad and Old Dixie, south of Mahanna Road and called it Colohatchee.

The oldest house now standing in Wilton Manors is at the corner of Old Dixie and Mahanna Road (NE 24 Street) and is owned by C. H. Hutchinson. The old-time structure was built around 1912 by a man named Johnson, called Uncle Billy, who farmed and kept a dairy. As an example of how well built the house is, the floors are of three inch Dade pine. Uncle Billy bought his farm from Oliver and sold out to E. J. Willingham in 1924 and there begins the story of Wilton Manors proper. Willingham appeared on the scene in this community as the developer of Lauderdale Beach in 1923.

After having that well underway, he acquired the ground here and platted Wilton Manors Unit Number 1 in 1925. The plat of Unit No. 1 showed, but did not include the land lying along the North side of the South Fork of Middle River, although it apparently was owned by Willingham. He resided in the present Richardson house, having remodeled a smaller one on the side into the present commodious residence.

From present Lazy Lake came rock for construction. Wilton Manors was an ambitious project for a high grade subdivision. Wilton Drive, 90 feet wide, was improved with paving, sidewalks and light standards to be the axis of the residential district. Emphasis was placed upon the Northeast corner at the intersection of The Drive and Old Dixie. Block 69, adjacent to the FEC RR was reserved for business to be improved with two story buildings only. Sidewalks on Old Dixie were 10 feet wide. The entrance to the residential district was made impressive with two crenulated towers. But they were not just false fronts of stucco on lathe as were many similar structures which decayed and fell apart in succeeding years to become as many such did, gastly reminders of disappointed hopes and lost investments. They had concrete foundations and belt courses at each story with steel reinforcements as though built under present day building code. They were beautiful with decorative inserts of Coquina rock, and after the fashion of the famous architect, Addison Mizner, were given face relief. Between the towers a cable was strung to display a "Welcome to Wilton Manors" banner. The South tower had stairways to the upper floors and was used to take prospective purchasers to the top and show them the area. This tower and the block on which it stood were acquired some years ago by M. D. Mace. After completion of his own handsome residence, the tower with additions was converted into a unique and convenient residence while still preserving the original design.

It is said that the name Wilton was selected to perpetuate a branch of the Willingham ancestry in England, of which he was very proud and in order to be a credit to that name the Manors was restricted to Caucasians and the improvements were to be of non-combustible materials. Residents on the Drive were to cost not less than \$8,500; on Dixie Highway \$7,000, and all others in proportion. Indian names were given to all streets except the present 26th Street which was called Prospect Road. The restrictions were to run for 20 years or until 1946. Lots were sold for high prices. Wilton Drive lots near the towers sold for \$7,000; on what is now 23rd Street, for \$3,000.

The first home in the new subdivision was erected by Mr. Hiaasen on what is now 621 NE 21st Street. E. J. Willingham, Jr., erected the house nearest to the towers and it was the real estate office of the project. About eight residences were erected, all but one being of the adapted Mediterranean design.

Matters were progressing happily toward fulfillment of Willingham's dreams to make Wilton Manors a place of distinction as a select locality, and to augment his considerable capital. Then, suddenly disaster came in the form of the '26 hurricane. All activity ceased here and everywhere in Florida. That wind blew away all hopes and plans including, it is said, some three million dollars of Mr. Willingham's investment. But misfortunes seldom come singly... He returned to Byron, Ga. where his wife died in January. Two months later he followed her.

Persons responsible for the start of present day expansion on Wilton Manors are mainly: Dave Turner, Alvar Hagen, John Pedersen and Perry Mickel. Dave Turner, first Mayor of Wilton Manors is a Floridian, having been born in St. Augustine. He came to Pompano area in 1906 and moved to Ft. Lauderdale in 1912. About 12 years ago he and his family moved to Wilton Manors. In 1943, on expiration of the original deed restrictions, Mr. Turner bought out

the Willingham estate holdings. He had it surveyed and began to market the lots at a reasonable price, and soon disposed of them. In the last few years he has, in an association with James Dean and others plotted a large tract of land East of the FEC RR lying between NE 26 Street and North Fork of Middle River, which is being sold as Middle River Estates. Mr. Turner donated the land to the city on which the present City Library is built.

Alvar Hagen came upon the scene in '40 from Berwyn, Illinois. He acquired property adjacent to the Richardson Golf Course and along the South bank of Middle River, and some on the south end of the Drive. He built and sold residences. Built important business houses along Wilton Drive. He was one of the main persons responsible for starting the Wilton Manors Civic Association. Mr. Hagen donated a 100' x 500' piece of ground for use as a City park.

John Pedersen came here about the same time as Hagen and acquired considerable amount of land through purchase of tax property, which he sold at a reasonable price. He helped many people start a home by se-ling at low cost and loaning of construction money at reasonable payments.

Our present Mayor, Perry Mickel is an old timer here, having been Willingham's right-hand man during the development of both subdivisions of Lauderdale Beach and Wilton Manors. He also represented the Willingham estate for some time, paying taxes and looking out for the properties. Mickel bought a farm West of Andrews Avenue which he farmed in the winter. He has said he farmed in the winter and built homes in the summer to make up for what he lost during the season. However, Mr. Mickel was successful in business of operating a farm. He recently plotted his property and began selling lots and building homes.

In 1910, Louis H. Smith and his wife left Echols County, Georgia for Florida, the land of opportunity at that time as well as today. Their transportation was by horse and wagon, and after three weeks they arrived at Colohatchee, Florida, and located a home at Mahanna Road immediately east of the FEC RR tracks (NE 24 St.) Mrs. Smith, courteously referred to as Miss'us Maude by old timers in the county, has lived in Wilton Manors continuously since 1910 at the same site, making her without doubt, the longest living resident of the community. Miss'us Maude raised three boys - Guy, George and Kenneth. Guy and Kenneth live in Wilton Manors, and Guy is probably the oldest living person born within the boundaries of the city having been born in 1915. The Smiths can rightfully be called a pioneer family.

In looking for the oldest living resident of Wilton Manors we found that John Durden, now living at NE 6th Lane and 26 Street, has lived in the community for 41 years, having bought a farm in the vicinity of Oakland Park Blvd. and Andrews Avenue in 1914. When the boom started, Mr. Durden went into the road building business, and says that he finished paving Wilton Drive after Hatch, the road contractor, had failed to finish his contract. He also contracted streets and sidewalks for Willingham and other developers. He says the first street paved in Wilton Manors was the present route of 26th Street, from the Drive to Andrews, and was called Prospect Road. He tells many amusing stories of the time, among them about high-falutin' parties put on by the social set of those days.

In 1947 Wilton Manors was incorporated as a non-profit organization, municipal type, in circuit court of Broward County. An election was held and Alvar Hagen was elected President of the Council with J. Marvin Brown, Arthur Chabot, James Boyd and William Robinson rounding out the roster. Dave Turner was elected first Mayor of the new village and Katherine Johnston was made Village Clerk. Bill Robinson doubled in his duties as Councilman by acting also as the first attorney of the village.

Wilton Manors is considered one of the fastest growing communities in South Florida, especially during the past five years. Not only has there been a tremendous home development, but the influx of business has been most noteworthy. Today in the city of Wilton Manors there are 85 business establishments, comprising almost every type of business and professional service, including three doctors, a dentist, a dental laboratory and bookkeeping service.

As a comparison, five years ago 18 business persons were doing business on the Drive. Out of the original 18 business men five years ago, six are operating today: Lamar Braddy and Frank Starling of Manor Market; Bill Hickson of Old Bills Bar and Package store; Doc Williams of Williams City Drugs; Bert Muzzell of Electra-Pliance; Don Grose of the Grose Barber Shop and Les Bagwell of Tropical Paint Supply.

Five years ago, 250 homes comprised Wilton Manors, whereas today 1500 homes are occupied, and many more are under construction. The city boundaries, five years ago, comprised about one square mile while today the city takes in all the land between the south and north forks of the Middle River, about three square miles. About five thousand lots are still available for development. In a short time, at our rate of growth, the population could reach 15,000.

The village of Wilton Manors was incorporated by an act of the State Legislature into a city in 1953. The people of the city five years ago depended on wells for their water supply, whereas today there are over 1400 water meters in operation providing city water. The system is valued at \$350,000. The growth of the city is reflected in the number of paid employees on the payroll. In 1950 there was only one on the payroll, while today the total is 12, not counting the city attorney and bookkeeper. The city has a volunteer fire department, recreation program, park

facilities, garbage pick-up service. Other improvements include the drainage, and rebuilding of Wilton Drive into a four lane highway by the State Road Department.

The social life of the community five years ago was taken care of by a golf course, Wilton Manors Civic Association, Woman's Club. Today, in addition to the above, other organizations active in the city are the Highland Civic Association; Kiwanis Club; Sinawiks; Wilton Manors Business group; PTA; Jaycees; Jaycee-ets; Jr. Woman's Club; Teenage Club; Lions Club; Little League Organization and Wilton Manors Sports, Inc.

The religious life of the people is taken care of by Covenant Church, Wilton Manors Baptist Chapel, St. Anthony Catholic Church, a new Christian Church and a newly organized Lutheran Church.

An added boost to the business outlook is the completion and opening of the new Wilton Manors National Bank.

Wilton Manors today would be a surprise to the founder if he could see it. The business district did not develop on Dixie Highway as he had hoped, but is mainly along Wilton Drive, which he had planned to be lined with stately two story homes. Mr. Willingham planted the beautiful royal palms that you see on the bank of the South Fork of Middle River, west of the Drive. He had hoped to line not only Wilton Drive with them, but all other of the important streets he longed to develop as well.

All in all, the community has grown and will continue to grow, for Wilton Manors is the "homey" type of community where people are interested in making it "the best place to live".