

Exploring the history of 2209 Wilton Drive—the early years

Manor Market opened at 2209 Wilton Drive in May of 1948 as a semi-open-air market with sawdust floors. It was Wilton Manors' first grocery; and had the first telephone in town. In 1952 owners Lamar Braddy and Frank Starling enclosed and expanded the building and added off-street parking in the rear. Mr. Braddy was known for his elaborate promotions to get customers in the store. But it wasn't enough to match the competition from chain supermarkets like Food Fair, Grand Union and Stevens that had opened in the Manors. Manor Market went out of business in 1959. Braddy and Starling re-purposed part of the building that same year as the **Flame Restaurant**. But, despite the elaborate signage and good initial reviews, it only lasted something over a year.



In early 1961, Clayton Leaver, Al Hagen's contractor, and his wife Lou, today considered to be the matriarch of the Woman's Club, envisioned (for reasons uncertain) re-opening the venue as a Hugh Hefner-esq private supper club—**The Playmate Club**. While the key club concept was quickly dropped, other similarities remained. Cocktail waitresses were known as "Baby Dolls". Want-ads indicated that they must "...be attractive, age 23-32 [and] wear shorts to interview". A 1962 Sun-Sentinel review noted: "*The Baby Dolls, who provide service and good viewing, engage in an impromptu twist number, led by Marie Martin, whose costume, ringed in fringe, gives the dance extra dimensions. The gal also shakes a cocktail while she twists, and serves it at ringside...*". The review went on to praise "*the Playmate's excellence as a dining and dancing spot*". The Playmate Club lasted until 1965—to be replaced by the **Back Door-A-Go-Go** lounge. More on that and later clubs in the next Town Crier.



Ft Lauderdale News Apr 06, 1962

The Playmate club

"Where the Beautiful BABY DOLLS are"

● DAILY BUFFET LUNCHEON \$1.25
All You Can Eat

Dancing Nitely
(Except Tues.) to the Rhythm of

Our Famous Steak Baked Potato, Garlic U.S. TOP CHOICE SIRLOIN Bread, Salad, Coffee \$2.95
Private Dining Room Available for Banquets and Private Parties
Phone LO 6-9252

TODAY'S SPECIAL
Steamed
SHRIMP
or Broiled
LOBSTER
All You Can Eat **\$1.95**

THE TEMPOS

2209 Wilton Dr., Wilton Manors

Questions or comments? Contact Ron and Mary Ulm at wmhs@WMHistory.org

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Exploring the history of 2209 Wilton Drive—from Go-Go to Gaga, the later years

{continuing from the last issue ...} After the *Playmate Club* closed in 1965, it was replaced that same year with the *Back Door Restaurant & Lounge*. The *Back Door* initially had a supper club theme like *Playmate Club*; but without the racy “Baby Dolls”. But after a few years it came to embrace the disco era and was renamed *Back Door-A-Go-Go Lounge*. By 1975, the *Back Door* had an identity problem. There was a daily “businessmen’s lunch” that included a lingerie and go-go show. Thursdays nights were a male go-go show (with a Tahitian fire dancer?). Other nights it was a Blue Grass Band venue. The following year it settled on a “Country Music Supper Club” theme and lasted until sometime in 1978.

PHONE 565-0711
BACK DOOR LOUNGE
MALE GO-GO DANCERS EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT!
 PRINCE HENRI ★ TAHITIAN FIRE DANCER ★ BLUE GRASS BAND WED., FRI., SAT., SUN.
BUSINESSMEN'S LUNCH and ...
 LINGERIE SHOW EVERY AFTERNOON, FOLLOWED BY DYNAMIC GO-GO SHOW!
 BRING THIS AD & GET A FREE DRINK WITH LUNCH

NEW EXCITING
 Fine Polish-European Dining & Dancing
Sir Nicholas INN

The *Sir Nicholas Inn* opened at 2209 Wilton Drive in January, 1979. It began as a Polish/Eastern-European supper club. It was heavily advertised and a popular tourist destination. Strangely, in 1986 the venue was subdivided, with the *Sir Nicholas Inn* in one section and the *Tabiti Inn* in the other (perhaps as a mini Mai-Kai?). As reported by the Sun-Sentinel in late December 1986, both ventures failed, “...the *Tabiti Inn* closed and re-opened as *The Palms*. *The Palms* is quite different from its predecessors. It caters primarily to a homosexual clientele.”

TAHITI INN RESTAURANT & LOUNGE
 • Rated finest Chinese Cuisine East of San Francisco
 • Dinners served by candlelight
 • Romantic entertainment
 • Relaxing atmosphere
 • Early Birds 5-6 P.M.
 Also featuring the Classic Polish-European Cuisine of
Sir Nicholas Inn
 Including:
 Pierogi Dinner \$7.95
 Sunday Buffet \$8.95
 Polish Experience Dinner \$10.95
 2209 Wilton Drive Wilton Manors, FL 33305 (PARKING IN REAR)
 TEL: 564-4901 RES.
 OPEN TUES.-SUN. 5 P.M.

CHARDEES
 dinner-cocktails
 2209 Wilton Drive
 Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33305-2131

In October 1990 Tony Dee, a strip mall/condominium developer, purchased the entire block. He re-imaged *The Palms* into an upscale supper club dubbed *Chardees*. It would be only the second gay restaurant in Broward and Palm Beach. According to an extensive 2005 *NewTimes* article it was “aimed specifically at silver foxes and their admirers”. It featured top-tier entertainers like Eartha Kitt, the Ink Spots, Pudgy, Jennifer Holliday, Judy Tenuta, and the Glenn Miller Orchestra. The *New Times* described it as “a glittering gay mirage in a desert of boarded-up strip malls, trailer parks, crack houses, and abandoned buildings strewn with garbage”. After a change in ownership in 2005, *Chardees* ultimately closed in 2007; after 17 years of operation.

Shortly after the closing of *Chardees* in 2007, *Bill's Filling Station*, a gay nightclub, quickly moved from its original location on N.E. 13th St. to take its place. The following year unknown Stefani Germanotta debuted her first single recording “Just Dance” at the Miami Winter Music Conference—using the stage name Lady Gaga. She began her first record release parties Memorial Day weekend 2008, with stops at *Score* in Miami and *Bill's Filling Station*. (right is a rare photo of that actual performance) And you know how that eventually turned out ...



Questions or comments? Contact Ron and Mary Ulm at wmhs@WiltonManorsHistoricalSociety.org

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Memorial Day 2008 unknown Stefani Germanotta, now performing as Lady Gaga, began her first record release parties at Bill's Filling Station in Wilton Manors.

2008 Lady Gaga performance photos at Bills Filling Station. Clipped from 'www.fanpop.com/clubs/lady-gaga/images/20867826/title/performance-photos-from-bills-filling-station-photo'.





May 25, 2008

Lady Gaga performed at Bill's Filling Station with her dancers Dina and Pepper as part of the Just Dance Promo Tour. She wears a latex jumpsuit by Haus of Gaga, a jacket by Maison Margiela, shoes by Burberry Prorsum, and sunglasses by Gucci.