

Editor's Note: After this article was originally published Ray Parker provided us with additional information: IMPSAT was not a tenant in the early 1990s, but did, in fact, purchase the entire property in 1998. He also was not aware of the 1970 library/park/boat ramp proposal. But he suggested that the “park” site purchase likely reverted back to Parker and later became the location of the Riverside Townhomes. Further WMHS research possibly identifies the “abandoned wooden building”. In 2009 pioneer Eileen Mackey spoke of 1930s residents on Dixie Highway, including: “*Jimmy and Margaret Brown lived where the big tree is at 2040 N. Dixie Hwy, where the Parker Electronics Bldg., now Pride Center are ...*”. Given the timing, one has to wonder if they might have turned the Colohatchee Woman’s Club building into a residence. RAU 12/2023

“South end of Dixie at the River”—what preceded the Pride Center?



The Colohatchee Woman’s Club was chartered in 1916—with 20 members. In **1917** the *Miami Herald* reports that their (unnamed) Treasurer had provided land for a clubhouse, and that construction had begun. The location of that property was generally the current site of the Pride Center and Riverside condominiums.

The clubhouse served as the primary community center and social hub for the entire Colohatchee area (now Oakland Park and Wilton Manors). The club remained active at that location until **1936**, when, for reasons not documented, the land, building and equip-

ment were sold at auction (we have no record of the purchaser). Shortly after, the group built a new clubhouse on Dixie Highway in Oakland Park and renamed itself the Oakland Park Woman’s Club.

The original property appears to have remained unused and undeveloped for the **next 25 or so years**. There are anecdotes of kids playing by the river and in-and-around a giant tree at the Dixie Highway curve; a Roland Lindberg, of NE 24th Street, who had his chicken coops under “the big tree”; and an abandoned wooden building. But no other record exists of further activity on the site.

But a change would begin around **1960**. That’s when Louis Parker, from Connecticut, wealthy founder of Parker Instruments (makers of measuring gauges), decided to semi-retire in the area. Also an avid inventor (with 250 patents—including one found in every TV in the world), he opened a small shop on Dixie Highway, **Parker Electronics**, to pursue new inventions and innovations. But he soon became intrigued by the vacant 7+ acres across the street as the site for a manufacturing/research subsidiary of Parker Instruments. According to son Ray that came to fruition when he purchased the property and built the first plant and laboratory building around **1964**.



Parker was also a philanthropist. In **1966** he donated some \$1.5 million to build the Parker Playhouse; and another \$1 million for construction of the Parker Physical Sciences Center at Nova University. As to Wilton Manors, in **1968** Parker offered to build a stand-alone cardiac hospital on the Dixie Highway property, but was rebuffed by the county Hospital Authority. A **1970** newspaper article indicates he offered to buy 3.7 acres at Dixie and NE 20th Street for a City library/park/boat ramp complex. We could find no further record of what happened to that proposal.

Over the years the Parker family continued adding commercial/industrial buildings to the site; as well as the Riverside Townhomes. In the early **1990s** IMPSAT, which provides satellite telephone and television relays to and from South America, became one of the tenants. As Parker Electronics wound-down and IMPSAT continued to grow, they purchased the entire remaining property in **1998** (...remember the satellite dish farm?).

And our story concludes in **2008** when the Gay and Lesbian Community Center (now Pride Center at Equality Park) acquired the entire tract for its new campus ...

Questions or Comments? Contact Wilton Manors Historical Society —wmhs@WMHistory.org

Ron Ulm—11/2023