

# WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## **"Commemorating the Centennial of the E.J. Willingham's Founding of Wilton Manors"**

*Town Crier article, images of plat and interpretive markers,  
and related images/links/notes*

by Ron Ulm

November 2025

This compilation begins with the Winter 2025-2026 *Town Crier* newsletter article about a November 20, 2025 event in Richardson Historic Park--which commemorated the centennial of the founding Wilton Manors by E.J. Willingham. This included unveiling by WMHS of historic interpretive markers re: the Willingham Estate.

Following the *Town Crier* article are:

- WMHS President Mary Ulm's introductory remarks at the event
- Willingham's 1925 plat of "Unit 1 of Wilton Manors" (with the site of his estate and home highlighted)
- full-size images of the interpretive markers
- a ca 2002 image of the urn stand from the original Willingham property (with the Carriage House in the background, and the vacant space between annotated as the site of his estate home) and
- a photo illustration of the general location of the Willingham estate home in the current Richardson Historic Park parking lot and
- photos of the installed interpretive markers.

*[Unfortunately, due to publication deadlines, the Town Crier article had to be written and submitted some three weeks before the event was actually to take place. The same for the included link to this document (which turns out to have been incorrect, but now fixed). This document was also written and initially posted to our website in advance of the event--such that it would be accessible to attendees of the event. It has since been updated.]*

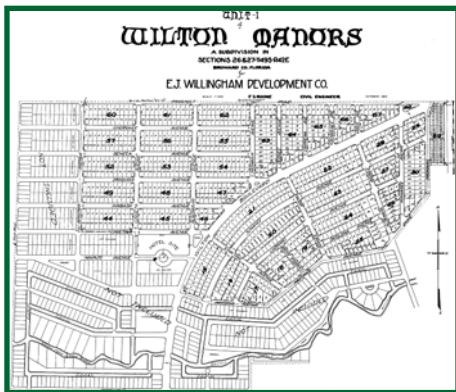
### ***Looking for more details?***

***Click/tap here*** for a mini-archive of E.J.Willingham's 1926 sales brochure and newspaper ads for "Wilton Manors".

***Click/tap here*** for an article containing a detailed biography of E.J. Willingham (from the 1912 publication "*Men of Mark in Georgia*"); as well as newspaper clippings of E.J. Willingham family obituaries/eulogies and curator notes.

***Click/tap here*** for an article and images of the restoration/re-purposing of the Willingham Carriage House.

## Commemorating the Centennial of the Founding of "Wilton Manors"

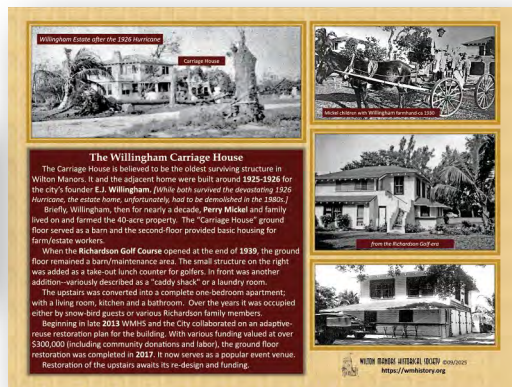
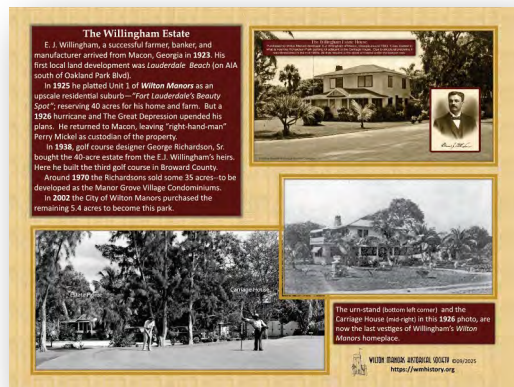


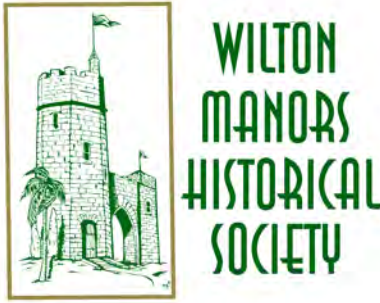
The founding of Wilton Manors came on **October 26, 1925** when **E.J. Willingham** filed the plat for **"Unit 1 of Wilton Manors"**.

Willingham was semi-retired as a successful farmer, banker, manufacturer and philanthropist from Macon, Georgia. His vision for *Wilton Manors* was an upscale residential suburb—"*Fort Lauderdale's Beauty Spot*". He reserved 40 acres for his own estate home and farm on the site. The entrance gateway was built, streets were paved, and lighting installed — but the 1926 hurricane and The Great Depression upended his plans for further development.

WMHS, in collaboration with Leisure Services, recently commemorated the **centennial of Willingham's legacy and vision** for Wilton Manors with a reception at the Carriage House. This included the unveiling of interpretive markers (below) in the Richardson Historic Park parking lot — which document the story of what remains of the site of his homeplace. Visit them the next time you are there to see

the details! Can't wait to learn more? You can also download them from our website at <https://tinyurl.com/100yrsWM>





Introductory Notes – November 20, 2025  
“Commemorating the Centennial of the E.J. Willingham's  
Founding of Wilton Manors”

**Opening remarks:** Good evening, friends and neighbors. Tonight, we celebrate 100 years since our beloved city first took root.

In 1925, E.J. Willingham **filed a plat for “Unit One of Wilton Manors” dreaming of an upscale, beautifully landscaped suburb.** He built towers at Five Points—locals called them “the Castles”—to mark the entrance. Roads were paved and electricity installed. Though the 1926 hurricane and Great Depression ended his plans, his **vision left a lasting mark.**

**Willingham’s home**, demolished in the mid-1980s, once stood in the parking lot of this park. His **Carriage House**, originally his barn, and a stone **urn-stand** are living reminders of our history. The Historical Society’s **Archivist, Ron Ulm**, has designed **three interpretive markers** to document Willingham’s presence on this site which have been placed in the parking lot.

With the **City’s blessing**, in 2013, the **Historical Society initiated** the restoration of the Carriage House to save the building and give it new life as a historic venue. Many of you contributed to our fund-raising efforts and attended an event called **“Open the Doors”** organized in 2015 by Paul Rolli and Bennett Quade and also who offered a matching grant. Don D’Arminio and Marc Martorana generously transformed the event into an **elegant catered affair.** **In the end**, the Historical Society was able to fund roughly half of the restoration and the city the other half. In 2017, the ground floor restoration was complete, **and reborn as the gathering place we enjoy tonight.**

**Thank You** – Please join me in thanking our City for organizing tonight’s event, ably lead by Michelle Parks and her team, and for providing the food. The Wilton Manors Business Association, celebrating 75 years of service, is providing beer and wine.

## **Acknowledgement of distinguished guests – (those in attendance)**

Mayor Scott Newton, Vice-Mayor Chris Caputo, Comm. Don D'Arminio, Comm. Paul Rolli, Former State Representative and Mayor Jack Seiler, Former Mayor John Fiore, City Manager Leigh Ann Henderson, Restoration Carpenter Ted Arpin

## **Turn program over to speakers:**

- Mayor Scott Newton
- Former State Representative and Mayor Jack Seiler
- Informal presentation by Ron Ulm about E.J. Willingham's family history and the development of "Wilton Manors"



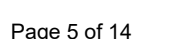
E.J. WILLINGHAM DEVELOPMENT CO.

SCALE 1"=200

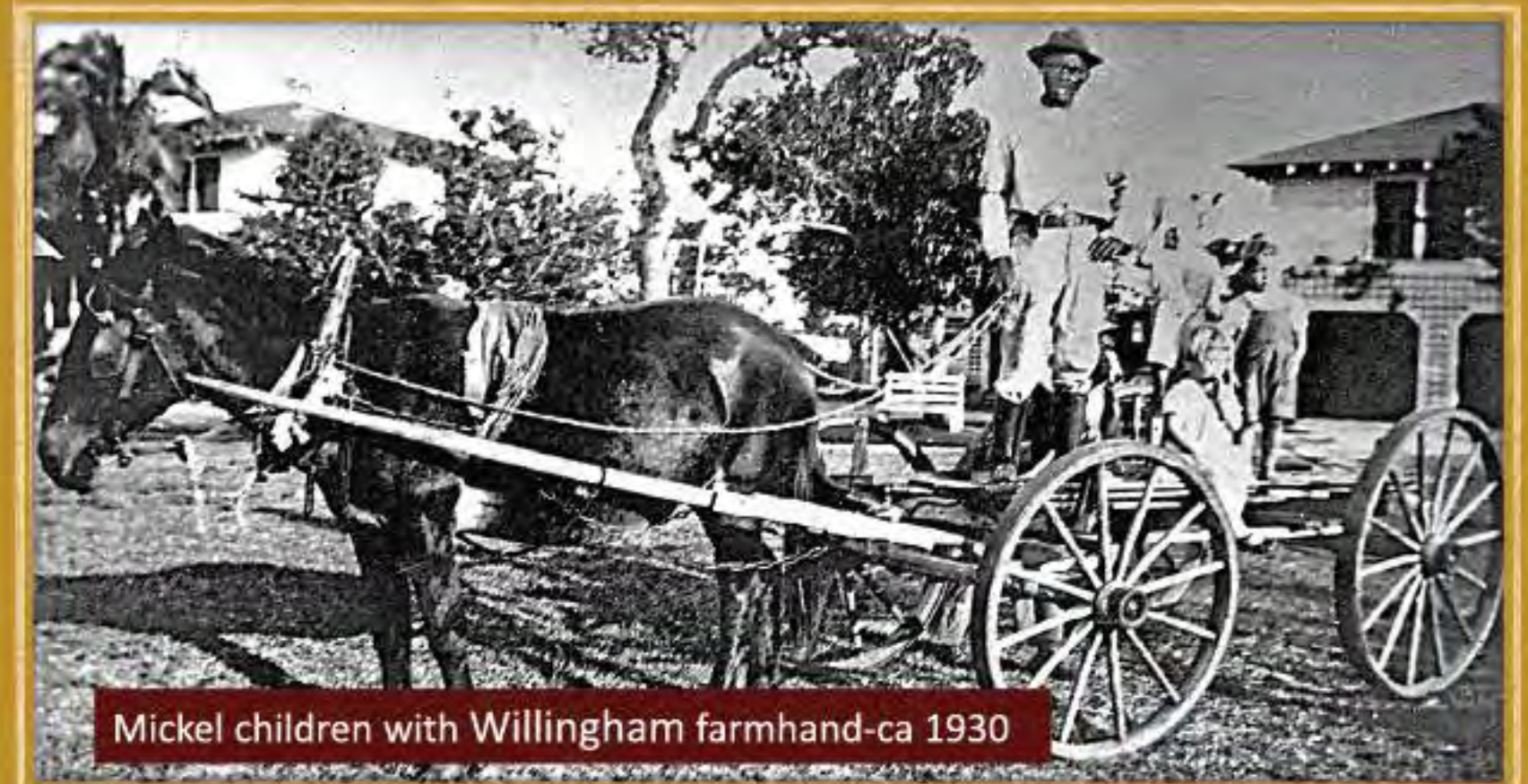
**J S RHINE**

**CIVIL ENGINEER**

OCTOBER 1925







## The Willingham Carriage House

The Carriage House is believed to be the oldest surviving structure in Wilton Manors. It and the adjacent home were built around **1925-1926** for the city's founder **E.J. Willingham**. *[While both survived the devastating 1926 Hurricane, the estate home, unfortunately, had to be demolished in the 1980s.]*

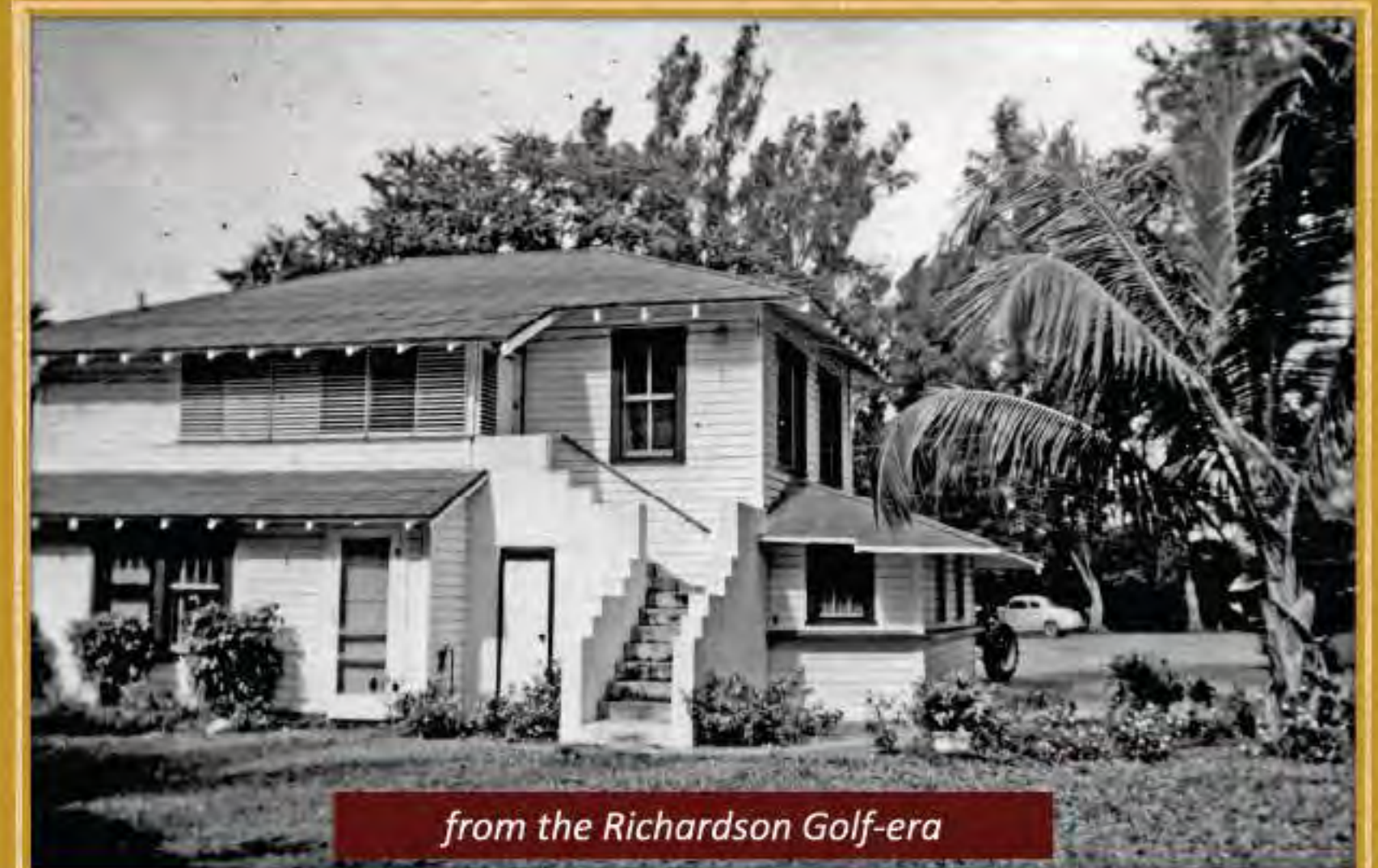
Briefly, Willingham, then for nearly a decade, **Perry Mickel** and family lived on and farmed the 40-acre property. The "Carriage House" ground floor served as a barn and the second-floor provided basic housing for farm/estate workers.

When the **Richardson Golf Course** opened at the end of **1939**, the ground floor remained a barn/maintenance area. The small structure on the right was added as a take-out lunch counter for golfers. In front was another addition--variously described as a "caddy shack" or a laundry room.

The upstairs was converted into a complete one-bedroom apartment; with a living room, kitchen and a bathroom. Over the years it was occupied either by snow-bird guests or various Richardson family members.

Beginning in late **2013** WMHS and the City collaborated on an adaptive-reuse restoration plan for the building. With various funding valued at over \$300,000 (including community donations and labor), the ground floor restoration was completed in **2017**. It now serves as a popular event venue.

Restoration of the upstairs awaits its re-design and funding.



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## The Willingham Estate

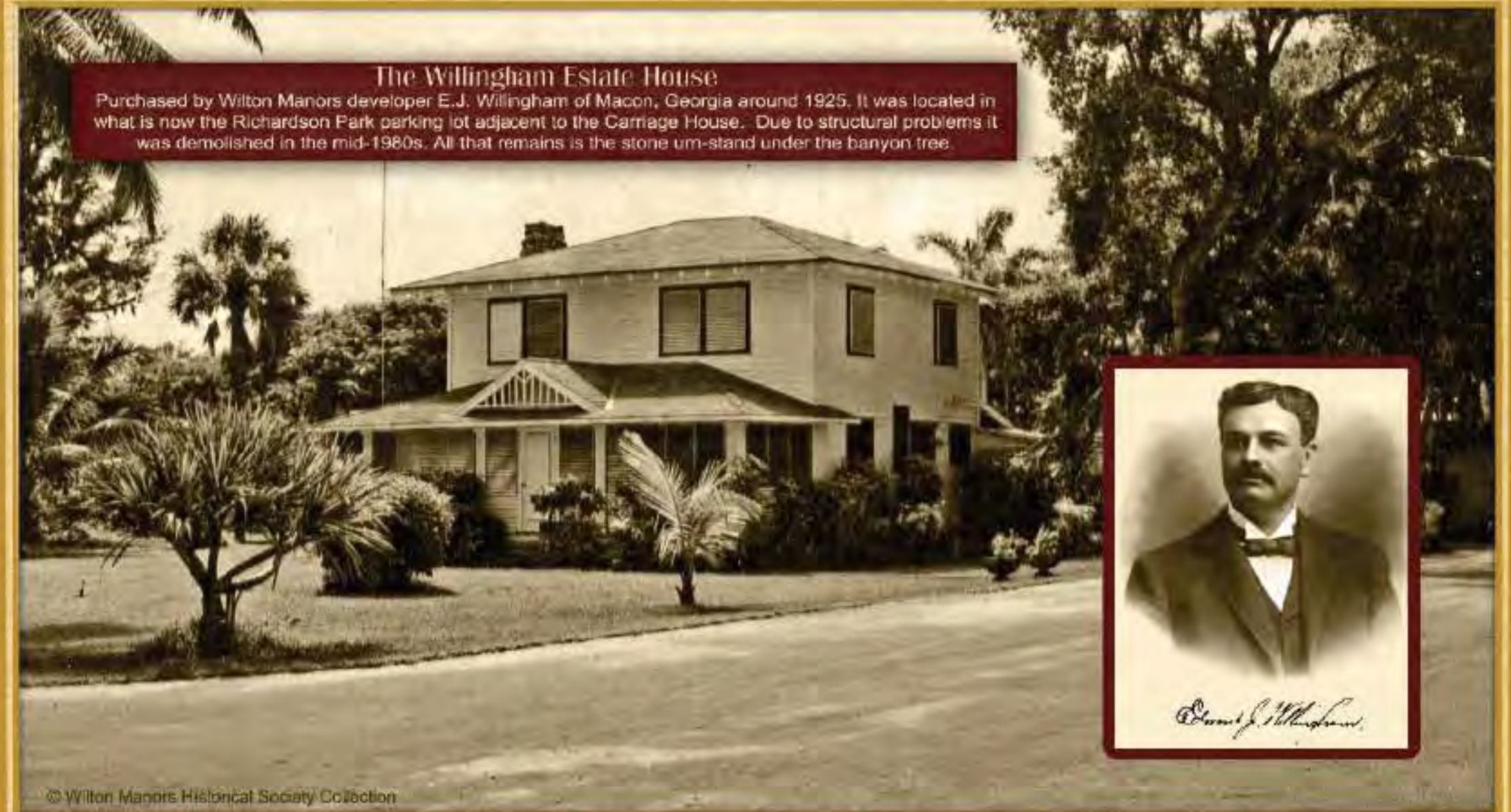
E. J. Willingham, a successful farmer, banker, and manufacturer arrived from Macon, Georgia in **1923**. His first local land development was *Lauderdale Beach* (on AIA south of Oakland Park Blvd).

In **1925** he platted Unit 1 of **Wilton Manors** as an upscale residential suburb—“*Fort Lauderdale’s Beauty Spot*”; reserving 40 acres for his home and farm. But a **1926** hurricane and The Great Depression upended his plans. He returned to Macon, leaving “right-hand-man” Perry Mickel as custodian of the property.

In **1938**, golf course designer George Richardson, Sr. bought the 40-acre estate from the E.J. Willingham’s heirs. Here he built the third golf course in Broward County.

Around **1970** the Richardsons sold some 35 acres--to be developed as the Manor Grove Village Condominiums.

In **2002** the City of Wilton Manors purchased the remaining 5.4 acres to become this park.



The urn-stand (bottom left corner) and the Carriage House (mid-right) in this **1926** photo, are now the last vestiges of Willingham’s *Wilton Manors* homeplace.



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This urn-stand, along  
with the Carriage  
House, are the last  
vestiges of the 1925  
homeplace of Wilton  
Manors founder E. J.  
Willingham.



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[site of the demolished Willingham estate home]

original urn stand from the property

image ca 2002





Approximate location of the Willingham estate home --  
now the Richardson Historic Park parking lot.



Placed by the Wilton Manors Historical Society, January 2008

[illegible]











