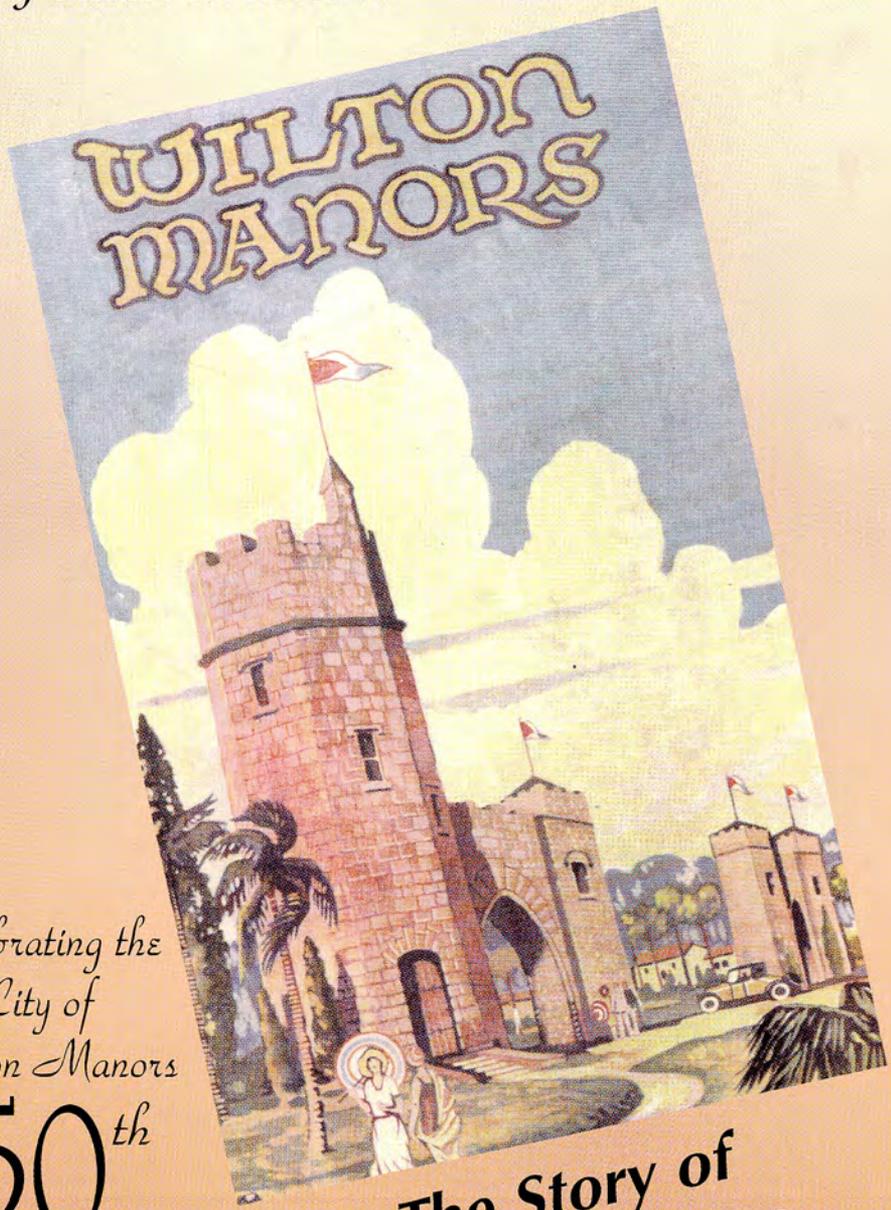


The Island City

By Stuart B. McIver



Celebrating the
City of
Wilton Manors

50th
Birthday

1947-1997

The Story of
Wilton Manors

NOTE: SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH INDICATES A NUMBER OF FACTUAL ERRORS OR INCONSISTENCIES IN THIS DOCUMENT, AND IT SHOULD BE QUOTED WITH CAUTION. **WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY** RECOMMENDS VERIFYING WITH OTHER PUBLICATIONS; OR CONTACTING US AT **WMHS@WMHISTORY.ORG** FOR CONFIRMATION OF INFORMATION YOU WISH TO QUOTE.

The Island City

The Story of Wilton Manors

By Stuart B. McIver

Published by
THE CITY OF WILTON MANORS

City of Wilton Manors 50th *Birthday*
1947-1997

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Stuart B. McIver, a prolific author of books and stories on Florida, has now added to his list another historical work, the first history of Wilton Manors. *The Island City – the Story of Wilton Manors* was commissioned as part of the city's fiftieth birthday celebration.

McIver's ten books on Florida include *Fort Lauderdale and Broward County: an Illustrated History*; *Coral Springs, the First Twenty-Five Years*; *Yesterday's Palm Beach*; *True Tales of the Everglades*; *Glimpses of South Florida History*, and *Hemingway's Key West*. His most recent books are Volumes 1 and 2 in his Florida Chronicles Series, entitled *Dreamers, Schemers and Scalawags*, and *Murder in the Tropics*. In addition, he is the coauthor of *Rating the Presidents*, published in early 1997.

The author is also the editor of *South Florida History Magazine*, published by the Historical Association of Southern Florida and the Caribbean. He was writer-producer of "Alligator," a documentary film which won a Silver Medal in the Venice Film Festival.

A 35-year resident of South Florida, he lives now in Lighthouse Point with his wife, Joan, who is also a writer. McIver, a native of Sanford, North Carolina, is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is a former president of the Book Group of Florida and is currently secretary of the Florida Chapter of the Mystery Writers of America.

Chapter 1

In the Beginning



The Middle River as it looked to the Indians and to the early settlers.
- Broward County Historical Commission

When E.J. Willingham made the first plat of Wilton Manors in 1925, he gave its future streets Indian names — Cherokee Street, Nokomis Street, Algonquin Street. It was an appropriate gesture. The first people to live on the island formed by the two forks of the Middle River were Seminoles. Their largest camps were located near the eastern fork, not far from today’s Federal Highway.

They were living there when William C. Collier, an Alabaman, began raising oranges on the south bank of the north fork in the early 1890s. The Indians liked Collier and his oranges so much that they named the river after him — Colohatchee, Collier River.

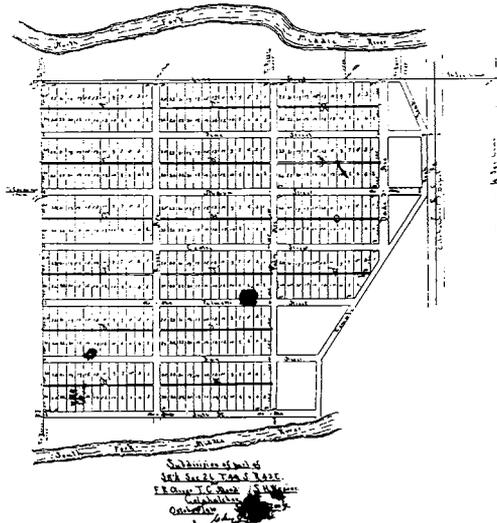
At about the same time a Jacksonville company headed by Duncan U. Fletcher bought 1,310 acres on the north and south sides of the river and established the Florida Fiber Company. The company’s plan was to grow sisal hemp for use in rope and other coarse textiles. The company did so poorly that in 1891 it petitioned Dade County for relief from its

burdensome tax bill of \$32.41, a harbinger of the days ahead when a major selling point for homes in Wilton Manors would be “no city taxes.” Florida Fiber eventually closed down and platted its land to be sold as Progresso.

In 1892 George A. Farnham of Saratoga Springs, New York, bought 42 acres on the north fork from the Boston and Florida Atlantic Coast Land Company for \$515.37. The company had acquired considerable acreage as a grant from the state for its role in building what would later become the Intracoastal Waterway, into which Middle River flows. Farnham held the land, apparently as an investment, until his death three decades later.

Life began to stir around Middle and New Rivers after the completion in 1892 of the County Road from Lantana on the shores of Lake Worth to Lemon City on the shores of Biscayne Bay. Stage coaches ran from Lantana to the north side of the New River and from Lemon City north to the south side of the river. There a ferry operated to carry passengers, freight and mail across the deepest river on the stage line’s run. The Middle River was crossed by two small bridges near today’s Dixie Highway.

The man picked to operate the ferry was Frank Stranahan, a cousin of the owner of the stage line. A man with respiratory problems, Stranahan had moved to Florida to escape the cold winters of his native Ohio. He assumed his duties on the shores of the New River on January 31, 1893.



The plat of the town of Colohatchee, as laid out by Frank R. Oliver, T.C. Moody and S.H. Weaver in October, 1910.

- Broward County Historical Commission

Stranahan established a trading post to deal with the Indians who lived on the river and in the Everglades. In 1896 Henry M. Flagler put the ferry out of business by bringing his railroad south from West Palm Beach to the New River and then on to Miami. Small settlements sprang up along the railroad's path and a town began to grow near the location of an 1838 Seminole War fort. Stranahan became the founding father of a city which would take the name of the fortification — Fort Lauderdale.

He bought farm land on the southeast tip of the island. It would later become the Coral Point subdivision in Wilton Manors. In 1900 Frank married Ivy Cromartie, the community's first school teacher. Years later she reminisced to a *Miami Herald* reporter about their farm:

"We'd go out to the farm in a buggy or a canoe. It was a beautiful trip by water. Both New River and Middle River were very clear, and we could see tropical fish of all colors swimming around under the canoe. There was lots of wildlife along the banks."

Alligators, she said, sunned themselves by the rivers and wildcats and bears roamed through the neighborhood. An eagle kept a nest in a tall pine tree within sight of their farm.

"I frequently made trips at night along the paths," she said, "but I always carried a lantern. The animals were afraid of the light."

Near the farm Seminoles were seen regularly cultivating coontie, a plant from which they concocted a soup called "sofkee." Two large Indian camps were located near the forks of the river, just west of today's Federal Highway.

In 1910 Frank Oliver, T.C. Moody and S.H. Weaver of Fort Lauderdale laid out a plat for a sub-division they called Colohatchee, lying between the south and north forks of the Middle River, just west of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks. Among the names of the east-west streets were Bay, Palmetto, Centre, Main, Pine and Lime. One of the north-south thoroughfares was Dade Avenue. The island was at that time part of Dade County. A note on the plat indicates that just a mile west lay the Everglades.

By 1910 the population of Stranahan's town had soared to 143 people. When the town fathers realized that Dania, lying just to the south, was planning to annex their community, they moved quickly to incorporate Fort Lauderdale in March, 1911, just as Wilton Manors would do 36 years later when threatened with annexation by Fort Lauderdale.

That same month an enormous promotion overran the area. Richard "Dicky" Bolles, a real estate promoter who had bought half a million acres of Everglades swamp land from the state, held a giant land auction in Fort Lauderdale. His Florida Fruit Lands Company conducted a combination auction and lottery to sell land in the newly-drained Everglades. Or as the sales literature called it "Tropical Paradise," "Promised Land," or "Land of Destiny." *The New York World* called

these eager salesmen “swamp boomers.” For \$240 a buyer could purchase a farm in the Glades, hopefully one above water, with a dry-land lot in Progresso thrown in.

During a one-week period in March, 1911, more than 3,000 people rode Florida East Coast Railway trains into a town of less than 150 residents. One who came to town that memorable year not to buy but to sell was Winborn Joseph Willingham, from Macon, Georgia. He was known as “Windy Joe,” possibly as a play on his first name of Winborn but more likely because of his profession. Windy Joe Willingham was an auctioneer, pressed into duty to auction off land for Tom Bryan, one of Fort Lauderdale’s most prominent leaders then and for many years to come. Windy Joe would provide a significant key to the future of the City of Wilton Manors.

In 1912 a sturdy house was built in the area between the two forks of the Middle River. Uncle Billy Johnson built the home using three-inch Dade County pine for his floors. Uncle Billy farmed the land and operated a dairy.

In 1915 the east coast towns from Deerfield to Hallandale decided it was time to break away from Miami and Dade County. That year Broward County was formed, named in honor of Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, whose drainage program had opened up the Everglades land that Dickey Bolles and his swamp boomers had sold.

That same year Dixie Highway was completed through Broward County, linking the area to the northern states. Described as “rocky, rough, full of potholes, narrow,” it was the first major road opening up the southeast coast to the new conveyance now available to vast numbers of Americans. World War I, which ended in November of 1918, had slowed the spread the automobile but not for long. Florida would soon be echoing with the roar of auto engines.

By 1919 movie makers were beginning to take advantage of the state’s exotic, tropical settings. That year many sequences of *The Firing Line*, starring the famous dancer/actress Irene Castle, were shot in the pine woods near Colohatchee. Chemical torches illuminated night hunting scenes, giving the jungle “the appearance of a veritable fairyland,” wrote the *Fort Lauderdale Herald*. Based on a popular novel by Robert Chambers, the silent film was shot in black and white by Famous Players Corporation.

To Florida the Roaring Twenties would mean more than just Prohibition, bathtub gin, flappers and the popular dance, the Charleston. It would mean an uncontrollable explosion of growth the likes of which no other American state had ever lived through. It was called simply the Boom. The *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel* of July 30, 1920, heralded it prophetically:

***BUILDING BOOM STARTED
AND WILL CONTINUE***

For Windy Joe Willingham it was time to return to Florida. In Pompano he auctioned land at Pinehurst-by-the-Sea and sold land for Harry McNab east of what is now Federal Highway. The Great Florida Land Boom was rolling. It was time also for Windy Joe's cousin Edward John Willingham, better known as Ned, to appear on the scene. After all, Windy Joe had told him:

“All live wires in Fort Lauderdale. No knockers there.”

Chapter 2

The Founding Father

Edward John Willingham arrived in Fort Lauderdale in 1923, lured to the land partly by Windy Joe's glowing tales and partly by his own shrewd eye for business. In his native Georgia, he had established an impressive record in retail furniture and in farming. He cultivated extensive peach orchards and was said to own the most beautiful pecan grove in Middle Georgia. He was one of the founders of the Bibb National Bank in Macon and was also chairman of the board of directors of the Georgia Industrial Home.



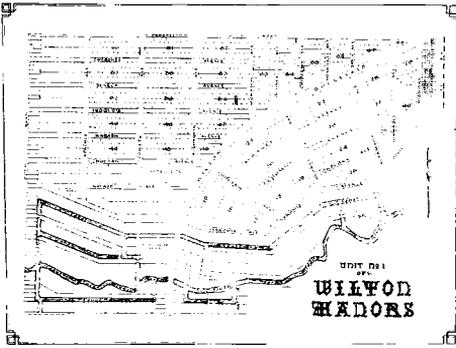
E.J. "Ned" Willingham (standing, third from left) in a picture with his father (seated, in center) and his eight brothers.

- Middle Georgia Genealogical Library

On August 18, 1861, in Macon, just after the start of the Civil War, Willingham was born into a distinguished Georgia family. One of his great nephews was the noted author Calder Willingham, who wrote the novel *End as a Man* and the screen play for the acclaimed 1967 motion picture *The Graduate*. Both of E.J.'s college-educated parents were so dedicated to higher education that all thirteen of their children who grew to adulthood were sent to college. This came, according to

the family genealogy, "at a time when the South was suffering its deepest depression as a result of the ravages of the War Between the States."

Already armed with plenty of money for startup costs, Willingham came to Fort Lauderdale in 1923. He was associated for a time with M.I. Anglin, developer of Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. Then he launched his



Willingham's 1925 plat for Wilton Manors, Unit No. 1, complete with Indian names for streets.

- Broward County Historical Commission

own development. From the North Palm Beach County developer, Harry Kelsey, he bought a prime parcel of real estate, the land lying between the ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway, extending from what is now Birch State Park to Oakland Park Boulevard. He called it Lauderdale Beach. Vista Park at Twenty-Eighth Street and A1A was given to the city by Willingham.

By this time the Roaring Twenties were roaring in Broward County. To the music

of the Jazz Age bootleg whiskey was flowing too fast for the revenueurs to keep up and real estate was selling too fast for the paper work to keep up.

Along Las Olas Boulevard West Virginian Charlie Rodes was creating "finger isles" and labeling Fort Lauderdale "the Venice of America." To the south Joseph Young was developing a new city, Hollywood-by-the-Sea, well on its way to becoming for a time the largest in the county. North of Fort Lauderdale, Pompano was booming.

It was all too much for Frank Stranahan: "We are getting in too much of a rush here. City life too fast for me."

In those heady days of 1924 Ned Willingham bought Uncle Billy Johnson's farm, just north of Middle River and west of Dixie Highway. Ned saw it as a suburb of the county seat. He planned at first to call his subdivision Willingham Park, then settled on Wilton Manors, making use of the first three letters of his surname. The rumor would later circulate that Wilton was chosen because it was the maiden name of his wife. Not so. Her maiden name was Eula Felton.

The following year Willingham bought an additional 30 acres from M.C. Slagle, a Kansan who had come to Fort Lauderdale in 1919. That year Slagle had purchased 20 acres from "old man (Dr. Leslie) Maxwell" for \$4,500. In 1925 he received a down payment of \$7,500 for his land.

By now Willingham was ready to proceed with the plat of Wilton Manors Unit Number 1. He had accumulated 345 acres of pine land,

referred to later in his publicity as “wooded highland.” Location was a major strength of his subdivision, positioned within the northern limits of Fort Lauderdale and reached easily by automobile along the new Dixie Highway and by train from the FEC station at Colohatchee.

J.S. Rhine, civil engineer, completed the first plat, filed with the City of Fort Lauderdale in October, 1925. In the plat the subdivision extends west from Dixie Highway to Northeast Third Avenue and south from Prospect Road, today’s Twenty-sixth Street, to the canal just north of Middle River. Although his two previous developments fronted on the ocean, he concentrated in his first plat on residential property in the “wooded highland” area of his land.

“A splendid canal system is planned for the second unit of Wilton Manors,” said the Willingham sales brochure, “and entrancing Middle River is to be widened and deepened for small pleasure craft.”



The southern approach to Wilton Manors crossed the south fork of the Middle River.
- Broward County Historical Commission

For his main street Willingham chose the name Wilton Boulevard, now known as Wilton Drive. No business property was to be permitted on the boulevard, which was to be “exclusively residential.” The street ran diagonally southwest from Dixie Highway, thus creating a location which would be known as Five Points. It would become a central Broward County landmark, but also the source of many traffic tie-ups and fender-benders. To cross the south fork Willingham built a bridge twenty-six feet wide, which, he claimed, was the state’s widest.

Most of the streets had Indian names but not those of Florida Indians like Osceola or tribes like the Seminoles. For example the street on which today’s City Hall is located was named Choctaw. Among the

other names were Algonquin, Nakomis, Mohawk, Chippewa, Sioux, Cherokee, Seneca, Hiawasee, Okolona Avenues. Willingham named two other streets for rivers near Macon, Georgia — Ocmulgee and Oconee. Though spelled incorrectly, Sewanee, a river which rises in south Georgia also rated a name.

Ludowici Avenue lacks the sound of the old Indian nations. Why was it on the plat? Ned picked the name of a city not far from Macon.

“A picturesque site has been reserved in the central portion for the development for a hotel that will, in all probability, be built in the very near future,” claimed the brochure. Its location was to be on the west side of Wilton Boulevard at Choctaw.



The rockpit that became Lazy Lake.

- Broward County Historical Commission

To provide rock for roads, sidewalks and building foundations, the Willingham company excavated construction materials from a rock pit within the town. His publicity people glowingly touted it as “some of the best rock to be found in the vicinity of Fort Lauderdale.” The long-range strategy, declared the sales brochure, was to later convert the rock pit into “a beautiful lake, covering 5 acres of ground and attaining an average depth of 18 feet. This lake will provide ample facilities for swimming, boating, and other aquatic pleasures.”

The rockpit actually became a hole in the City of Wilton Manors. It would be known as Lazy Lake.

Willingham’s goal was to create “a high-class residential suburb” within a natural setting, “blending with the splendor of a tropical sky and sub-tropical verdure.” Five parks, small green spaces, some of them along the river, were included in his plan. These were to be preserved “in perpetuity” for the residents. He established a nursery on the south side of the subdivision near the river for beautifying boulevards, streets and parks. The nursery would be available, too, for residents to acquire plantings for their own properties without cost. The nursery contained 4,000 orange and grapefruit trees as well as coconut and royal palms and shrubbery.

Willingham promised “complete public utilities — electricity and water from its own wells.” Other “splendid” improvements would include 15 miles of paved streets all 30 feet or wider, 30 miles of cement sidewalks, 15 miles of white-way lights and 30 miles of parkways.

An indication of Willingham’s commitment to his new development was his choice of an architect to design the Wilton Manors entrance

gate. The Georgia peach tycoon picked Francis Abreu, Fort Lauderdale’s premier architect.

In the 1920s land boom the prevailing architectural style along the Gold Coast was Mediterranean, drawing heavily on Spanish and Italian influences. The work of Palm Beach’s Addison Mizner, the most famous of all the Gold Coast architects, has been described as “Bastard-Spanish-Moorish-Romanesque-Gothic-Renaissance-Bull-Market-Damn-the-Expense Style.” For Florida’s trendy structures Abreu’s credentials were excellent. For one thing he was of Spanish descent and for another he had acquired a solid foundation at Cornell University, where he had majored in architecture and the fine arts.



The Wilton Manors Towers, designed by Francis Abreu, under construction.

- Broward County Historical Commission



Willingham named his main street Wilton Boulevard.

- Broward County Historical Commission



The Abreu family moved to Fort Lauderdale in the early 1920s. Francis was promptly given the assignment of designing a beachfront home for his wealthy grandfather. The home at Alhambra Street and AIA still stands today as the Casablanca Restaurant. Among his other Broward County designs were the Fort Lauderdale Golf and Country Club, the Fort Lauderdale Municipal Casino and Pool, the Maxwell Arcade, the Dania Beach Hotel and many of the most beautiful homes in the Las Olas Boulevard area. He would later design many houses on Sea Island, Georgia, among them the home of the great American playwright Eugene O’Neill.

A *Fort Lauderdale News* story about Abreu, dated October 11, 1925, revealed that the architect was working with a backlog of \$3 million dollars worth of architectural projects. One of these assignments was for “the field office, entrance gates and observation towers for Wilton Manors for E.J. Willingham, being designed in Italian Gothic.” His fee for the design was \$50,000.

Abreu based his concept for the entrance on the gates to Casa de Salinas in Salamanca, Spain. “The Gates,” as they were first called, became the symbol of Wilton Manors, an impressive entrance to the new community. The towers were located on the west side of Dixie Highway at Wilton Drive. An archway between each set of towers, provided a passageway for the sidewalks along Wilton Drive.



The cover of Willingham's sales brochure.

- Broward County
Historical Commission.

The builders, Prescott and Boyd, used rock from Lazy Lake to build the crenelated towers atop a concrete foundation for \$12,000, which coupled with Abreu's fee made the cost of the towers \$62,000, a considerable sum in 1926. Decorative inserts of coquina rock enhanced the beauty of the structure. Between the towers were strung cables supporting a banner which proclaimed: “Welcome to Wilton Manors.”

In October, when the Abreu story ran, the future still looked feverishly rosy. By New Year's Eve the boom was unraveling. In the summer of 1925 the Internal Revenue Service had begun demanding tax payments on big-ticket sales — in cash. Speculators started trembling. Most of their profits were still on paper.

During the previous summer the Florida East Coast Railway, overwhelmed by the crush of passengers and cargo, declared an embargo to catch up on railroad and rolling stock maintenance. Shipment of construction materials slowed to a stop by early winter as more than 7,000 south-bound freight cars backed up at the Jacksonville yards. Meanwhile a ship sank in Government Cut, blocking the entrance to Miami's harbor and sealing off sea lanes into the busiest of the boomtime cities.

Willingham, fighting a shortage of building materials, pushed hard to get his development opened in 1925. Finally on January 30, 1926 the *Fort Lauderdale News* ran the big story, topped with an eight-column headline that read:

“WILTON MANORS ALMOST READY FOR MARKET.”

The drop from the headline told readers, “Manors Features Lofty Entrance Gate and 100-Foot Boulevard Which Shortens Route South.”

The story’s lengthy lead read:

“Wilton Manors, described as being something new and different in suburban developments and destined to become one of the most beautiful residential areas in Florida, is the realization of the practical, yet unique vision of its developer, E.J. Willingham. The Manors consists of 345 acres of pine-clad land strategically set within the northern limits of Fort Lauderdale between the east and west Dixie Highways.”

At that point something went wrong in the story. The tenth and eleventh lines were printed upside down, an omen perhaps, pointing ahead to eminent disaster. Still, the story made it clear that Wilton Manors would be opening soon, unfortunately to a buying public that was fast becoming a great deal less eager to buy.

Willingham, his right-hand man Perry Mickel and the sales staff used the towers as administrative and sales offices. A stairway to the top of the tall south tower gave salesmen the opportunity to give prospective “home-seekers” a view of the community they hoped would rise from the pineland. It was a fine view, Mickel later said, but prospective buyers never got to see a bustling town.

Then on February 9, a full-page ad in the *Fort Lauderdale News* printed the big announcement. E.J. Willingham Development Co. was open for business. But where were the buyers?

In all the company’s ads the art work featured the architect’s drawing of the gates. Declared the copy: “Wilton Manors is already an established community — within the city limits of Fort Lauderdale — two miles north on the Dixie from the city’s business district — where values must increase rapidly with the city’s inevitable expansion to the north — exclusive, convenient, accessible —between the East and West Dixie Highways — next to the Florida East Coast Railroad — with the south fork of enchanting Middle River in its Southern Boundary — highly developed and extremely beautiful.”

The ads, always tastefully presented, hit hard at the theme of streets and roads. Wilton Boulevard was described as the new East Dixie Highway shortcut, 80 feet wide with 10-foot parkways on either side,“ eliminating seven turns on the old Dixie...” The ad also claimed 11 1/4 miles of paved streets.

The company struggled bravely to impart a mood of optimism. Ads pointed out that even before the sales office opened more than a quarter of a million dollars worth of lots had been sold. Lots ranged in price from \$3,000 to \$7,500, fairly high numbers for the time. Residences on Wilton Boulevard were to cost no less than \$8,500, on Dixie Highway,

\$7,000. All sales were restricted to Caucasians.

Early ads sometimes made overstated claims: "Wilton Manors is fast becoming populated. Seven homes are now being erected, some have been completed, and two others were contracted for during the past week. Such settlement in an exclusive, restricted, residential community, combined with the excellent nature of improvements, means that values enhance accordingly. Here is an unusual opportunity!"

The first house sold in Wilton Manors was bought by Carl A. Hiaasen, a partner in the prominent law firm of McCune, Casey, Hiaasen and Fleming, which represented the Willingham company. The two-story



Willingham built homes of varying styles and sizes. The two-story house became the home of Carl Hiaasen.

- Broward County Historical Commission

house, at Choctaw and Ludowici, is still standing and Carl Hiaasen's name has been perpetuated through his grandson. A later Carl Hiaasen has emerged as one of Florida's major novelists.

By February 19 the Wilton Manor's ads were growing smaller, featuring restrained themes like "You owe it to yourself to investigate" and "Character Makes Value." On March 5 the ad had shrunk to a half page and 11 days later the size was only two columns by four inches with a soft-sell appeal to "discriminating home-seekers."

On March 7, the *Fort Lauderdale Sun*, a new daily newspaper which had started publication on February 1, 1926, ran a Wilton Manors ad.



From its administration building the Willingham Company struggled vainly to stay in business.

- Broward County Historical Commission



Along the Dixie Highway near the northern entrance to Wilton Manors.

- Broward County Historical Commission

In it Willingham was clearly recognizing that the market had changed drastically:

“Many real estate operators are beginning to realize that the hectic days of enormous profits have passed; that also is our belief.

“The conservative buyers who are satisfied with a safe and sane profit on their investment are the people we desire to interest in Wilton Manors.”

On April 10, 1926 the Willingham Development Co. ran its last ad. The boom was over. The Great Depression that came to the rest of the country in 1929 arrived in Florida in early 1926.

That summer Perry and Dorothea Mickel built a garage apartment near the ocean, just in time for the next disaster. On September 18, 1926, a hurricane struck the southeast coast. Winds of 140 miles an hour hit Miami and South Broward. The Mickels sat in their car and watched the winds wreck their apartment.

In Broward County alone the death toll reached 49, for the entire state the number was nearly 400. Although Willingham’s home was

badly damaged, Wilton Manors, high and dry as pinelands usually are, weathered the physical damage. The land survived. Ned Willingham's dream did not.

All over the area businesses and banks were failing. The river of checkbook-bearing out-of-towners slowed to a trickle. Where were the new buyers to feed money into the market? Already the older buyers were defaulting on their payments. Properties were reverting to the developers who didn't want them. They couldn't pay the taxes on the land.

M.C. Slagle, who had collected \$7,500 from the Willingham company as a down payment on his 20 acres, wound up owning his land again. He also got to keep the \$7,500. He was among the few who came through the real estate bust in good financial shape.

Ned Willingham and his wife returned to Macon, leaving his properties in the hands of his son, E.J., Jr., and Perry Mickel. The Mickels in the meantime had raised their beach apartment and built a first floor under it. They had little time to enjoy it. In those Prohibition days rum runners began unloading cargo too close to their home, "too close for comfort," as Perry put it. So, said Dorothea, "We sold the beach house to the Capone gang and they burned it later." The Mickels moved into Ned Willingham's old home to take care of the house for the developer, but trouble wouldn't go away. Citrus canker attacked the orange grove back of the house and the trees had to be uprooted and burned.

In the short time that remained for him Ned Willingham maintained his ties to Fort Lauderdale. With young August Burghard, champion swimmer, newspaper editor and later Florida historian, the developer shared Georgia backgrounds. August had attended Mercer College in Willingham's home town, Macon. When the bank where Burghard's wedding funds were deposited failed, the developer, still reeling from a \$3,000,000 loss, loaned the young man the money to get married.

In the early fall of 1927 Ned Willingham suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. He lingered on for seven months before dying in an Asheville, North Carolina, hospital on the last day of March, 1928. He was 66. At that he outlived his wife Eula by exactly two months. The obituaries of both Willinghams were prominently displayed on page one of the *Macon Telegraph*.

Norman Malcolm, seeking information for a brief history of the town for the *Wilton Manors Bulletin*, wrote:

"Mayor (Dave) Turner, who knew Willingham well, said the latter always carried his check book along and paid on the spot. When the collapse came, nobody suffered by Willingham's defaults since there were none.

"Seldom has extended inquiry been made among so many people about a man engaged as Willingham was without some unkind

criticism but your investigator encountered nothing but praise for the Founder of Wilton Manors. Mr. Hiaasen characterized him as 'One of God's noblemen.'"

Chapter 3

Quiet Years in the Boonies

A month after his father died, E.J. Willingham, Jr., administrator of the estate, filed an amended plat to Unit 1, Wilton Manors. In it the Willingham company relinquished to the public the responsibility for the maintenance of all parks, streets and alleys in the subdivision. At a time when the company had lost \$3,000,000, this relieved the estate of a significant expense item. It also removed a portion of its property from the tax rolls, an additional cost break. The only other change of note concerned the names of several of the streets. Reflecting lowered expectations, Wilton Boulevard simply became Wilton Drive. Streets on the west side of the subdivision were changed to create a system of numbered streets. For example, Choctaw Avenue became N.E. 21st Court.



After the real estate bust and the death of Willingham the founder's home became the dwelling of the Perry Mickel family.
- Broward County Historical Commission.



The Wilton Manors Nursery.
- Broward County
Historical Commission

The plat, dated May 22, 1928, was signed by E.J. Jr., his wife Viola, his sister Mary Willingham Chambers and her husband W. Ross Chambers. Witnesses were attorneys C.H. Landefeld and Tom Fleming.

Meanwhile, Perry Mickel moved into Wilton Manors to manage and maintain the troubled Willingham properties. One of his tasks was to keep tax payments up to date.

Less than six months after the death of the founder, another vicious hurricane struck South Florida, thus further discouraging outside investment in Florida land. In September, 1928, 160-mile-an-hour winds battered both Broward and Palm Beach Counties. Flooding near Lake Okeechobee drove the final death toll up to nearly 2,000 people, the third worst natural disaster in the country's history.

Again, Wilton Manors held up well but there was little other good news as the depression deepened across the land. At the entrance on Wilton Drive the tower stood vacant. Children, playing in the empty building, knocked out windows and partially burned the stairs. Fearful the steps might collapse while children were playing on them, the company had to remove what remained of the stairs. No longer could prospective buyers climb the stairs to survey the community of Wilton Manors.

But then there were no prospective buyers, or for that matter no true community.



Transportation was primitive for three of the Mickel children, who traveled around the former Willingham property with "Old Neilly."

- Broward County Historical Commission

Mickel bought a cow and farmed about 25 acres on the island. In those days Wilton Manors was simply farmland or woods. One foggy morning in 1932 Perry milked the cows, then watched them disappear in the mist as they crossed Wilton Drive.

Suddenly, they came stampeding back home. Mickel went to the street to investigate. He saw two elephants strolling down Wilton Drive, one with a handler asleep on its broad back. Perry found out that the elephants had been taken off an overloaded trailer in West Palm Beach and walked to Miami for their starring appearance in a circus.

Dorothea Mickel, a trained nurse, continued to bring in income for the family by working in area hospitals and performing private duty. In the early 1930s the land north of Middle River and east of Wilton Drive had to be sold for taxes.

Perry retrieved the land for the Willinghams by selling the house on

Fifth Avenue to Frank Musebeck and the house at the entrance gates to George Smith, who owned a furniture store and a tire shop. He also rescued Willingham property in the Idylwyld section of Fort Lauderdale by insisting to attorney Tom Fleming, that the bank that held the mortgage would discount it for even a small payment. Fleming was skeptical but he came back beaming to tell Mickell, "My God, Perry, they took it."

Mickel continued to expand his farm, acquiring additional acreage



The Richardson Golf Course.
- George Richardson



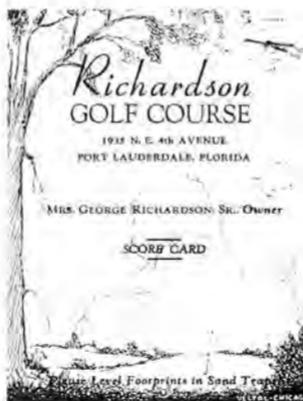
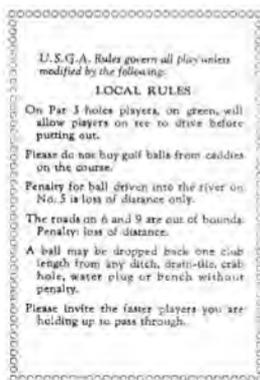
George Richardson, Sr., (center) putts on the eighth green.
- George Richardson

west of Andrews Avenue. Then in 1936 a large and as it turned out important sale was made. Fleming handled a transaction in which George Richardson, a native of North Ireland, bought "40 acres more or less" of prime land on the south fork of Middle River from Wilton Manors, Inc.

Richardson had an unusual occupation. He built golf courses and he built them for the best golf course architects in America, C.W. Tillinghast and the acclaimed Donald Ross of Pinehurst, North Carolina.

George and Rachel Richardson came to New York from Ireland when they were both in their twenties. George worked first in lawn maintenance and from that moved into golf course maintenance in 1918, the year their son, George, Jr., was born at Rydel, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. His next move was into golf course construction, following the plans of the architects who designed them. He built courses in Detroit and Tarrytown, New York.

Richardson used a labor-intensive approach, employing as many as 200 men on a given project. Operating long before mechanized land-moving equipment became available, he worked with simple scoops drawn either by mules or by tractors. He built 10 courses as well as the polo fields at Westbury, Long Island. Building a major golf course took about two years, so the Richardson family moved from city to city as each course was built.



The score card for the 2,820-yard, nine-hole course.

- George Richardson

Inevitably the 1920s land boom drew him to Florida. In the mid-1920s he constructed the course at the Fort Lauderdale Country Club, for which Francis Abreu had designed the clubhouse. After he finished his work at Broward County, the family moved north to build a course on

Montauk Point, New York, for Carl Fisher, the developer of Miami Beach and the promoter of the Dixie Highway.

"My father built the course in Fort Lauderdale just before the '26 hurricane," recalled his son George. "The storm blew it away." The collapse of the boom ended any chance of rebuilding it at the time.

Each winter the Richardson family returned to Fort Lauderdale. George, Sr., already saw it as a place to retire. Rachel, meanwhile, had invested in mortgages so despite the depression the family was well positioned to move to Florida and combine George's career and his retirement.

In 1936 Richardson found a property that suited his retirement plans perfectly. Close to downtown Fort Lauderdale and its resort area on the beach he located a suburban area on the south fork of Middle River, blessed with a good stand of pines and palms. And not subject to flooding. Through Tom Fleming, Richardson bought 40 acres of prime real estate plus a house from Wilton Manors, Inc.

"The price we paid was so insignificant I'd be embarrassed to reveal it," recalled George Richardson, Jr. "It was out in the boonies, out beyond Progresso. In 1936 there were just three houses in the town. One of them was owned by Carl Hiaasen."

George's father drew plans for a nine-hole course, then went north to complete a project he was working on. George, who was 18, and his

mother set about building the course to the elder Richardson's specifications. They worked with a tractor and a scoop. Buddy Hicks worked with them to construct the course and was still working for the Richardsons six decades later.

The design called for a par-three for the eighth hole.

"Where are we going to put the green, George?" the teenager's mother asked.

"I dropped a ball," said George, "and hit an eight-iron about 150 yards. Where the ball stopped, that's where we put the green."

By the winter of 1937 the course was ready for play, a 2,820-yard nine-hole layout, with an 18-hole par of 68. The course was built without any debt.

At the time the Richardson Golf Course, which was closed in the summer, was one of only three courses in the area. The others were the Fort Lauderdale Country Club, finally rebuilt after the '26 hurricane, and Orange Brook in Hollywood.

The Wilton Manors course drew heavily from winter visitors, particularly those staying at the Lauderdale Beach Hotel and the Hillsboro Club. Among the celebrities who played it were Homer Cummings, attorney general in the cabinet of President Franklin D. Roosevelt; opera singer Gladys Swarthout, and baseball magnate Ford Frick.

"Our golf course anchored Wilton Manors in those days," said George Richardson, Jr., "and I like to think it gave it a little forward motion."

In 1940 Alvar Hagen came to Wilton Manors from Berwyn, Illinois. He bought property adjacent to the golf course along the bank of the south fork of Middle River and additional land on the south end of Wilton Drive. He would become a major figure in the growth of the city by building and selling houses and business properties. He would play a significant role in organizing the Wilton Manors Civic Association, Inc., and would donate land for a city park.

At about the same time John Pedersen arrived in Wilton Manors and began to acquire land by purchasing tax-delinquent property. This enabled him to offer properties later at a reasonable cost.

In that same period Paul and Lillie May Dye of Fort Lauderdale bought the George Farnham property from the Resolution Trust Corporation, which took it over following foreclosure and a bank failure. Paul Dye was the son of Robert Dye, who with M.A. Hорт developed the ritzy Idylwyld section where Ned Willingham lived at one time. For his low-lying land on the north fork of the river Paul Dye had plans considerably less ritzy.

But Dye's plans would wait just as would those of other area developers. Any chance of significant growth stopped cold on December 7, 1941.

The expansion of Wilton Manors would not occur until after the United States of America brought World War II to a successful conclusion.

Still, in the midst of the war a significant event occurred in the community. Dave Turner, son of Broward County's first sheriff, moved with his family into Wilton Manors. In 1943 when the original Willingham deed restrictions expired, Turner bought out the Willingham estate properties in Wilton Manors. He would not turn out to be a man who operated on a small scale. Turner, in time, would become the biggest private landowner in Florida as well as the man who transformed Wilton Manors from a subdivision into a city.

Chapter 4

The Birth of a Village

When World War II ended in the summer of 1945, the first step for Americans was to celebrate. The second would be getting ready for business in a postwar world. Like many other far-sighted Floridians, Dave Turner knew it was time for the Sunshine State to prepare for a joy ride. Tourists would be flocking back for vacations in the sun and many servicemen and women who had trained in Florida would be coming back to live.

Born in St. Augustine in 1896, Turner had seen many changes in Florida in the half century he had lived. His father, Aden W. Turner, was Broward County's first sheriff, serving during the days of the land boom and the bust. After service in World War I, Dave ran the Fort Lauderdale store of Hector Supply Company, a leading supplier of feed, fertilizer and other farm products. Eventually he bought the store and like his father he moved into public service, becoming in time chairman of the Broward County Port Authority.



In the spring of 1946 the newly-formed Wilton Manors Civic Association met at Alvar Hagen's bar. Perry Mickel and his wife Dorothea are at far right, back row. Hagen is at the far left.

- Wilton Manors Historical Society



Mayor Dave Turner

- Bill Turner

After World War II ended, Turner set about in earnest to sell the 283 lots he had acquired from the Willingham estate for \$12,500. He began showing young families around Wilton Manors and extolling the advantages of the little community's excellent location.

"I'd give them a deed free and clear to the lots and let them pay me back when they could," he said.

Meanwhile, Mickel and Hagen were also selling lots and houses in a Wilton Manors that had expanded far beyond the small platted area first

introduced by Willingham. Residents now thought of most of the island as Wilton Manors. And Paul Dye, who had been farming his land on the north fork, had entered the game. After platting his holdings, he sold the western portion of his site to Victor Rothrock, of Polk County, leaving the low-lying land on the river, west of Dixie Highway, as Highland Estates. Rothrock replatted and developed his property as the Rothrock Subdivision.



Wilton Manors in the early 1950s before the bridge across Middle River connected 26th Street with Federal Highway.

- Mark Taravella

By spring of 1946 the estimated adult population of Wilton Manors had grown to about 125. On May 10 a group of home owners met at the office of Alvar Hagen to form the Wilton Manors Civic Association. By the time the meeting had broken up at 10 p.m. the group had elected A.O. Lefler chairman, James A. Boyd vice chairman and Mrs. Katherine Johnston secretary-treasurer. Committees named were: transportation,



Dave Turner and A.F. Camman; street improvements, James Farquhar and Harley Sanderson; and water, Hagen and John Pedersen.

Members went to work trying to improve water, garbage pickup and electrical service to the area, while the transportation committee worked to bring better bus service and improved

Chief of Police Richard Beaney, left, chats with city councilman Frank Starling, who would become the town's third mayor. - Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

street maintenance. One complaint was that Wilton Drive was being used as a raceway on Saturday nights. Requests were made to the county commission and to Sheriff Walter Clarke to enforce the speeding law.

At the November 1 meeting the members addressed the problem of how to head off annexation by Fort Lauderdale. Jim Boyd's minutes for the meeting reported the suggestions of a new member, Colonel W.J. Robinson:

"Mr. Robinson pointed out that the city of Fort Lauderdale was heavily indebted from the boom-bust of 1927 and if the city were to take this area in we would be paying these taxes, while if we incorporated into a village any taxes assessed the village would get the benefit (from) and these would only be levied by the will of the people."

On December 6 the association passed a motion requesting Robinson prepare a petition for incorporation. By the first meeting of 1947 the incorporation drive had moved ahead so far and so fast that the Highland Estates Association, representing home owners in Highland Estates, sent three representatives to the meeting. The Highland group was somewhat fearful that building codes and restrictions would be higher than their requirements.

The next month a preliminary petition circulated in the community gave the association an unofficial picture of how the vote was running.

Eight-seven favored it, ten opposed incorporation. The association still needed twenty-five more registered voters to make their petition official. Meanwhile Highland Estates decided against joining with Wilton Manors.

At the April 4 meeting, the civic association scheduled what its minutes called "the big meeting," a meeting so big it had to be held on the Richardson Golf Course on April 21. Colonel Robinson was authorized to take the legal steps needed to convert the petitions into official status as the Village of Wilton Manors. A slate of officers was nominated, headed by Dave Turner.

One ironic twist was the decision not to include in the village the golf course where the official meeting was held. Also omitted was the tiny community of Lazy Lake.

On April 28, 1947, the Broward County Circuit Court recognized Robinson's petition, declaring that what had started as a small subdivision in 1926 was now qualified as a non-profit organization to be known as the Village of Wilton Manors, population roughly 350 people. The unopposed slate became the village's first officers. Turner was named mayor and municipal judge. Alvar Hagen was elected president of the village council along with J. Marvin Brown, Arthur Chabot, James Boyd and Colonel William Robinson, who doubled as the village's first attorney. Katherine Clark became the village clerk.

The first town meetings were held in Hagen's real estate office on Wilton Drive. From 1947 to 1952 Wilton Manors records were stored in Colonel Robinson's law offices.

On May 13, 1947 the State of Florida completed its processing of the paperwork sent to Tallahassee and declared the community officially the Village of Wilton Manors. The world the little town was born into was a far different land from South Florida a half a century later. The population of the entire county was less than 80,000. Fort Lauderdale Mayor Harold Holden complained that his city had become "too noisy — motor scooters, motor cycles, speeding boats and airplanes." Television sets were just beginning to appear in private homes in 1947, the year President Harry S. Truman dedicated Everglades National Park and Edwin Land invented the Polaroid Land Camera.

In those simpler times prices were lower. Bacon sold for 47 cents a pound, catsup for 10 cents a bottle and 10 pounds of potatoes for 39 cents. A woman could buy a bathing suit for \$5, a dress for \$10 and a girdle for \$2.95. A man could purchase a suit for \$15. If he wanted to celebrate the dawn of an era, a fifth of Gladstone gin cost just \$2.83. If he wanted a bottle of bourbon, Kentucky Tavern would set him back \$6.98.

It was a wet year when the town was born and the rains of 1947 would have an important bearing on the future of the town. That year

a wet spring was followed by still more rain in the summer. Then in the fall within a space of 25 days two hurricanes and a tropical disturbance dumped so much rain on the area that much of South Florida lay under waters for weeks. Fort Lauderdale and Pompano were flooded, and Davie was covered with an inland sea for months. Most of Wilton Manors was high and dry.

The flood was so severe that the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District was created to try to prevent future floods. The first chairman of the FCD, which later became the South Florida Water Management District, was the Wilton Manors mayor, Dave Turner.

The rains of '47 gave real estate developers in unflooded Wilton Manors a powerful selling tool to add to "convenient location" and the enticing phrase "no city taxes."

Wilton Manors worked hard to keep its budget frugal. None of its elected city officials was paid and no costs were incurred for maintaining a village hall. In the early days the main expenses were street maintenance and a small volunteer fire department. Policing the village was still the responsibility of the county sheriff. By 1949 the sale of occupational and beverage licenses was running at \$1,200 a year. Between \$500 and \$750 was coming in each month from a cigarette tax. Income from the power company's franchise ran about \$1,400 a year, earmarked for street lights, benches and support for the volunteer fire department. Each household paid individually for the collection of garbage.

In 1948 Ann Wilmarth, director of Christian education at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, was sent by her church to canvas the Wilton Manors/Highland Estates area with an eye to establishing a church. In January, 1949, the Covenant Presbyterian Church was organized under Bethany's sponsorship.

The first services were held at the Highland Estates Civic Association building on Eighth Avenue. Reverend Larry Love, Bethany pastor, served as minister to thirty-three original charter members until Reverend Russell Toms became the church's full-time pastor. On land donated by Turner Covenant began building the village's first chapel in 1949. On October 4, Covenant Presbyterian Church was incorporated.



Mrs. Ann Wilmarth, far left, met with a group of members of Covenant Presbyterian Church in 1949. Left to right, Mrs. Wilmarth, Ms. Connie Erickson, Mrs. French and son, Mrs. Emily Sills, Mrs. Goering, Mrs. Emma Umber, Mrs. Doris Mason, Mrs. Macnamair, Mrs. Klipple, Mrs. Sarah Perrigo, Mrs. Grantland and Mrs. Burns.

- Covenant Presbyterian Church

By the end of the decade the population had grown to 700 persons. In time they would need more elaborate city services but the citizens were not quite ready to turn to these. In a November 8, 1949 election they voted, 74 to 4, against the question: "Are you in favor of levying ad valorem taxes against real estate?"

A year later 18 business establishments were operating in Wilton Manors, among them the Manor Market, Williams Drug Store, Barton & Miller Dry Cleaners, the Manor Lanes bowling alley and Kalis Funeral Home. That same year Leslie and Marcia Stafford, who lived in Fort Lauderdale, began looking for place to settle now that their first born son, Tracy, had arrived. They picked Wilton Manors because they had observed that it remained aloof from the devastating flood waters of 1947. They were concerned, however, that the Village had no school. At Broward School Board meetings, Marcia was repeatedly told, "Wilton Manors will never need a school."

Then she learned that Dave Turner had donated to the municipality the land to build the first school. The Staffords headed for the Taylor & Turner Feed Store with Tracy in a stroller. Turner sold them a lot for \$1,200, then when they told him they planned to build on it right away, he lowered the price to \$1,000.

On April 2, 1951 ground was broken for the Wilton Manors Elementary School on Northeast Third Avenue. It was located on land formerly used as a chicken farm. Construction workers kept finding empty whiskey bottles. Where they came from was easy to figure. Across the street from the chicken farm had stood a two-story house generally



In 1951 the Wilton Manors Elementary School opened with 183 students.

- Marcia Stafford

described by genteel residents as a "house of ill repute." It was also a house of a busy bar and illegal casino. The surplus whiskey bottles were buried across the street. The proprietors tried to keep a low profile.

Before the year was out the school, headed by its first principal W. Bryan Davis, was ready for 183 students. Within a year enrollment had grown to 310, producing severe overcrowding. In September, 1952 the Wilton Manors Elementary School was designated by the county disaster relief committee as a hurricane shelter.

In August, 1951, residents of both Wilton Manors and Highland Estates voted overwhelmingly for the annexation of the Estates community. Of 97 votes cast in Wilton Manors, 88 favored the move, nine opposed it. Highland residents cast 83 votes, 78 for, five against. Highland Estates added some 350 people to the town's population and brought

with them their community's volunteer fire department and fire truck located on Sixth Lane. At the same election voters in Wilton Manors voted, 57 to 45, against levying a three-tenths of a mill tax.

Dave Turner stepped down as mayor in 1952. To follow the man who had made Wilton Manors a town, voters turned to one whose roots went back even further. Perry Mickel, from the original Willingham organization, took over the position of mayor on March 3, 1952. Joining him on the city council was Frank Starling, who would succeed him as mayor three years later.

One of Mickel's first official acts was to sign the authorization for the appointment of the town's first police officers, charged with insuring "the peace, good order and observance of law within the municipal limits of the Town (not the Village) of Wilton Manors." Richard Beaney was named chief of police and William R. Hook police officer.

In a letter to the Village Council, President C.A. Saxer announced the formation of the Wilton Manors Volunteer Fire Company, consisting of 42 members. He asked that the village recognize the group as the official fire company of Wilton Manors and contribute funds for the purchase, maintenance and repair of firefighting equipment. C. Kass was named the first fire chief, but he served less than a year. In fact, the department was headed by no less than five fire chiefs in its first eight years. Among the early volunteers were Norman Malcolm, Frank Starling and Police Chief Beaney.

A permit issued on August 21 showed how much the town had grown. Food Fair bought property on the east side of Wilton Drive and announced plans to build the town's first supermarket.

Members of the Wilton Manors Civic Association were somewhat startled at the predictions made to them at their December meeting by State Representative Ted David. The young Hollywood legislator told them that South Florida was in line to become the greatest metropolitan area in the world with a population of 10,000,000 people. And right in the center, he told them, would sit the strategically located Village of Wilton Manors.

A group of developers, Turner, Jim Dean and Bob Roberts of Middle River Estates, Joe Schmitt and Charles Dalton, of Coral Gardens, and James Hunt and Joe Taravella, of Coral Point, also made a major announcement. Plans were made public to extend Twenty-sixth Street to Federal Highway by building a bridge over the north fork of the Middle River and connecting it with Galt Boulevard. On December 20, 1952 the bridge was dedicated and given to Broward County. More than 2,000 people stood on the bridge and the surrounding land as Turner handed the deed to County Commissioner Dick Gallion. By midnight, some 4,000 cars had driven across the new bridge, directed by an eventually weary Chief Beaney.



When the Twenty-sixth Avenue bridge was completed, thousands turned out for the big event.

- Mark Taravella

Most important of all, the Village of Wilton Manors made its first step toward moving the little town away from its dependence on artesian wells. The Village developed its first water distribution system at a cost of \$35,000. It was designed to serve 3,500 customers, a sure sign the town was coming of age.

Another sign, however, revealed that a lot of the “small-town” style was still strong. Marcia Stafford was elected village clerk in a three-way race. Municipal records moved to a new location — her kitchen.

Chapter 5

City Life

As early as July, 1952 city councilmen were looking into moving up a notch — from village to city. Young William G. Miller, Jr., a 1950 graduate of the University of Florida law school, had just become the new village attorney, succeeding Colonel Robinson. The practice of law ran in the Miller family. His father had been the Broward County prosecutor from 1932 to 1947.

Incorporating as a village had been easy but governing became more difficult as Wilton Manors grew. Increased costs ahead pointed toward future bond issues, easier obtained and better managed under the structure of a city. There was another consideration.

“We really incorporated to prevent a takeover by Fort Lauderdale,” said Miller, who lived on Twenty-Fourth Street.

As a village, Wilton Manors was little more than a non-profit organization, approved routinely by the Broward County Circuit Court. To move up to city status, the village had to gain approval from the state legislature. This would grant Wilton Manors greater powers and greater standing in financial markets.



James Dean

The council authorized Miller to prepare the documentation for cityhood. His secretary, Alicia Zachman, typed up the 55-page articles of incorporation on an L.C. Smith manual typewriter. Zachman later went to law school and eventually became the partner of Miller, who would serve as Wilton’s attorney for 30 years.

Jim Dean, city council president, carried the articles of incorporation to Tallahassee. On June 4, 1953 Wilton Manors became a city. But it still kept its small town ways.

Marcia Stafford, who would continue as city clerk for the rest of the decade, still kept the city records in her kitchen and conducted much of the city’s business from her home.

“It was Grand Central Station around here, a steady stream of people, policemen, new residents coming in the register to vote,”

Plans Unveiled for Huge Wilton Center



Architect's drawing for the original Manor Gate Shopping Center, complete with rooftop restaurant on 10-story office building. - Bill Turner

said Stafford. "Tracy and Nancy grew up with the business of the city swirling all around them."

(Marcia's son Tracy would put his rich political background to good use in later years as first president of the Teen Club, city councilman, mayor and eventually state representative.)

The city council met in the evening at the Village Hall, the meeting place also for almost all of the city's civic organizations.

"You could always tell when the scouts had met there earlier in the day," said Stafford. "The place smelled like peanut butter."

Peanut butter or not, Wilton Manors in the 1950s was poised to grow into its new status as a city. These were optimistic years, both in the country at large and in Wilton Manors. General Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected president by a landslide in 1952. And Wilton Manors liked Ike, giving him a 779-to-258 edge over the Democratic candidate, Adlai Stevenson. After a depression, a world war and the immediate postwar turmoil, the country and Wilton Manors were both ready to move ahead.

In August, 1953, Jim Dean announced plans for Manor Gate Shopping Center, a proposed five-to-seven-year, \$4,500,000 project to build 23 shops and a movie theater on a 15-acre tract on the south and north sides of Northeast Twenty-Sixth Street, just west of Wilton Drive. The architect's drawing showed a 10-story office building topped with a

rooftop restaurant on the east side of Wilton Drive. On the front of the building was printed the word “bank.”

“I showed the drawing to Dwight Rogers — he was my attorney,” said Dean. “He told me, ‘Take that word bank off there. You’ll never get a bank out there in all those palmettos and pine trees.’”

“I told him to just wait and see. We were going to get a bank and if he was interested I’d like to have him on the board of directors.”

A break with the past came when Willingham’s gatehouse tower was converted into a Baptist chapel. The chapel was ready in time for a Christmas program in December, 1953. All of its 100 seats were filled. In January, 1954 ground was broken for the construction of a new Wilton Manors Baptist Chapel across from the Wilton Manors Elementary School.

Another memento from the Willingham past also changed its status in 1954. To build roads and foundations for houses and the gate into Wilton Manors, the developer had dug deeply into the rocky area just west of his first plat. The result was a rockpit, which soon became a lake — Lazy Lake. Charles Lindfors, an accountant, bought the land in 1946 and developed it into a small subdivision in conjunction with Clinton Gamble, a Fort Lauderdale architect, and Hal Ratcliff, a general contractor. In 1947 they became Lazy Lakes’ first three families. Six years later the residents of Lazy Lake, totally surrounded by Wilton Manors, incorporated as a city, a very small one, less than 30 people. The purpose was to prevent a takeover by Wilton Manors, a city of some 4,000.

Lazy Lake’s action marked the latest in a strange parade of events. In 1911 Fort Lauderdale incorporated to prevent a takeover by Dania. In 1953 Wilton Manors incorporated to block Fort Lauderdale from the the same move. A year later Lazy Lakes moved to thwart capture by Wilton Manors.

No longer mayor, Dave Turner was still keeping busy in many ways. With Dean and Bob Roberts, he was developing Middle River Estates east of Dixie Highway. Lots in their development were ranging from \$2,250 to \$4,250 on the waterfront. Coral Point, developed by Joe Taravella of Coral Ridge Properties on the eastern tip of the island, was selling waterfront lots for \$8,500 to \$9,000. West of Andrews Avenue lots at Cuerva del Rio — the curve of the river — waterfront lots were \$3,300; inside lots \$2,220.

In addition to his business activities, Turner continued active in public service. He was named to the State Road Board as the representative for the Southeast District of the state. After he stepped down from the SRD, the state named a bridge for him. It was the connection that led residents of Wilton Manors most directly to the beach, the Oakland Park Boulevard bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway.

In December, 1954 ground was broken for the bank in the land of



In December, 1954 work began on the Wilton Manors National Bank.

- Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

“palmettos and pine trees.” At Northeast Twenty-Sixth Street and Northeast Fifteenth Avenue the city’s first bank opened its doors on April 28, 1955. Its first president was Dave Turner with attorney John E. Morris, Sr. named as chairman of the board. Joining them as directors of Wilton Manors National Bank were

such substantial local citizens as Dean, J. Morgan McJunkin, Albert J. Heinerman, Edward Smith, Jr., Edward Smith, councilman Earle Middleton, Fred “Doc” Williams, amiable proprietor of the Williams Drug Store and, of course, Dwight Rogers. Deposits for the first day totalled \$1,546,233. On June 30, 1955 total assets of the bank had already reached \$2,530,963.51.

By 1955 the city had grown to more than two square miles in area, triple its size just five years earlier. Some 1,500 homes were occupied with many more under construction. City employees numbered 12.

Following the lead of the Covenant Presbyterian Church, which had been founded in 1949, the Wilton Manors Baptist Chapel, St. Clement’s Catholic Church and new Christian and Lutheran Churches had been formed to minister to the spiritual life of the residents.



In 1955 the volunteer fire department proudly displayed its new fire-fighting equipment.

- Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

A number of civic organizations flourished: Wilton Manors Civic Association, the Woman's Club, the Highland Estates Civic Association, Kiwanis Club, Sinawiks, Wilton Manors Business Group, the Parent-Teachers Association, Jaycees, Jaycee-etts, Junior Woman's Club, the Teenage Club, Lions Club, Little League and Wilton Manors Sports, Inc.

The spirit of volunteerism was strong in the city. The Wilton Manors Volunteer Fire Department, in operation since 1952, moved into its new headquarters on Northeast Twenty-Second Street.

Volunteers created the city's recreation program in response to the growing number of active children in Wilton Manors. Alvar Hagen gave land near the city hall for a park. At Hagen Park concrete was poured in 1955 for a shuffleboard court and work begun on a shelter roof over the court.

That spring Mayor Perry Mickel granted Wilton Manors Sports, Inc., a dollar-a-year lease for two-and-a-half acres, west of Andrews Avenue, for Little League baseball. The organization promptly made plans for a

Fourth-of-July fund-raiser, combining ball games and a barbecue. Two years later the city established its first recreation department.

One thing was clear by the mid-fifties. The growth of local businesses and population demanded an increase in municipal services. Among other things, Wilton Manors needed a proper city hall to govern a municipality which would experience nearly a ten-fold growth



Mayor Perry Mickel gratefully accepts a check for the building fund for a new city hall.

- Fort Lauderdale Historical Society

in population in the fifties. In 1956 the city contacted officials of Food Fair, Inc., about acquiring a portion of their property, on Twenty-First Court, just off Wilton Drive. After months of negotiation, Food Fair donated land for the new city hall, which would also house the police department.

That same year Wilton Manors made a sharp break with its past. Real estate salesmen had long boasted of it as a town with no city taxes. No more. In November residents approved a referendum to establish the city's first ad valorem property tax of seven mills, to take effect January 1, 1957.

"There wasn't much outcry when taxes had to be levied," said Marcia Stafford. "People knew it was for water and sewers. Besides, it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody and they trusted Dave Turner, Jim Dean, Perry Mickel. And they trusted me, too."

Memorial Day, 1956, showed just how small a town Wilton Manors still was. Not a single accident or arrest was entered on the police blotter that day. Said Patrolman Frank Cave, "Apparently everyone moved out of town. Things have never been so quiet."

That same year Marcia Stafford discovered that her three-year-old daughter Nancy, noted for climbing everything from kitchen counters to refrigerators, was missing.

Police Chief Beaney quickly searched both forks of the river and all canals. With no trace of the little girl the chief drove to the Stafford home to report to her frantic mother. As he walked into the yard, a voice called down to him from a mango tree:

"Hi, Chief Beaney," said Nancy. In those days everybody knew everybody.

Before the year ended another relic of the past figured in the news. A variety of birds, among them parakeets and 15 valuable mynahs, made their home in the north tower of the Willingham city gate, the



Wilton Manors City Hall

- Marcia Stafford

wards of the "Bird Lady," Shary O'Hare. She lived with them rent-free for two months in the tower. She even posted signs proclaiming great wonders to be seen inside. When she sold a parakeet and cage to Mrs. Robert Ziawinski, of Wilton Manors, she was arrested for doing business without an occupational license. Court appointed physicians found her "incompetent" and she and the birds were evicted from "the Castle" by its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Emet Diamond.

Soon footage of Shary O'Hare and the tower appeared on Ralph



Ground breaking for City Hall in 1956 drew a happy crowd. Left to right, George Richardson, Mayor Frank Starling, Herman Quinn, V.W. Burnell, W.F. Seese, Earle Middleton, Wallace Wakely, Fred J. Stevens, Harold Price and Bert Barry.

- Wilton Manors Historical Society

Renick's 6 p.m. newscast on Miami's WTVJ. "Not the Bird Queen moving because the building is being torn down, but rather the building being torn down to move Mrs. O'Hare," Renick quipped.

The gate, designed by Francis Abreu, was torn down to make way for a sign of progress — an A and W Root Beer drive-in.

The dawn of a new year, 1957, marked the launching by the Wilton Manors Jaycee-ettes of a drive to establish a public library. The Florida State Library Board chairman had told them not to attempt it until they had at least \$25,000 on hand. Lacking the money but not the zeal, they called all service clubs in the city to send a representative to the Town Meeting Hall in February to get the project going.

Many residents donated books and Mayor Frank Starling donated a tiny key shop. On June 14, 1957 the small library opened. Mrs. Kathleen Klein volunteered her services as the first librarian.

In July 2, 1957 the city moved into its new city hall. The building, which cost \$125,570, was designed to house city employees as well as the police department. Particularly happy at the completion of the structure were the city clerk and the city accountant. Both of them had worked from offices in their own homes.

Arrangements were made to transfer the police radio tower to its new location. "We should be ready for business in our new wing a week from today," said Police Chief Tom Brace.

Chief Brace had been named to the post after Chief Beaney, at one time



Mrs. Kathleen Klein, seated, and Mrs. Mary Jane Schmidt are hard at work setting up the city's "Key Shop Library."
- Wilton Manors Public Library



In the library at the former city hall Mrs. Kathleen Klein helps Patricia Eimon, center, and Diane Dameron.
- Wilton Manors Public Library

the city's one-man police force, was fired. The council, concerned about "rumors of misconduct" associated with marital problems, removed him from office and elevated Sergeant Brace to the position of chief.

That fall the city took over the library and moved it into the newly vacated town meeting hall, the same building where the library drive had been started a year before. Two years later the building was doubled in size. By 1960 it contained some 10,000 books and magazines.

In her first column of 1958 Virginia Rogers, who wrote "Wilton Manors Topics" for the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, declared 1957 "one of the busiest, most productive years in Wilton Manors history...1957 saw a continuation of the building boom here. Important commercial additions include three shopping centers.... five restaurants, a bowling arena and more than 400 new homes. On January 1, 1957, there were 1,963 water meters here. Today there are 2,358, indicating at least 1,500 new residents and a total population in excess of 10,000."

The columnist's exuberant population estimate had residents looking ahead to the next official census in 1960. What would it show about a village that had grown into a city nestled in an urban world that was rapidly becoming vastly more complicated.

Chapter 6

Shooting for 10,000



Wilton Drive at Northeast 7th Avenue in March of 1960.

- Wilton Manors Police Department

Wilton Manors looked ahead eagerly to the Census of 1960. Would Virginia Rogers' predictions be on target for the city's population? Would it reach the magic number of 10,000?

In 1950, as a village, it had just 883 people. Ten years later the census showed the City of Wilton Manors had achieved an increase of nearly one thousand percent. The official figures were an astonishing 8,257.

Growth that fast was difficult to handle. In January of 1960 the city made a significant administrative change. A new position was created, combining the jobs of city clerk, treasurer, purchasing agent and



In between official city positions Marcia Stafford conducted story hours by reading to children at the library. Children left to right, Wayne Morris, daughter Nancy, and Mary Bush.

- Fort Lauderdale News Photo

elections supervisor into a new classification of city administrator/manager. Frank Starling, the mayor since 1955, was appointed to the new position. Succeeding him as mayor was Harold Price.

"I really didn't want it," Starling said in 1977, "but I took it on a temporary basis until they could get someone else."

Starling, who had served two terms on the city council and two more as mayor, continued his "temporary" post for 21 years until his retirement in 1981. Starling, a native of Key West, had farmed a thousand acres in South Florida and with his partner Max Braddy had sold beans, squash and peppers at Manor Market on Dixie Highway, one of the earliest businesses in Wilton Manors.

The appointment of Starling removed Marcia Stafford from city government after eight years as city clerk — but not for long. Out of office, she used her time well, teaching kindergarten, conducting story hours by reading aloud to children at the library and in the process continuing to make friends throughout the city. In November she ran for city council. She counted heavily on the votes of people she had served as clerk and won convincingly, the first woman ever elected to the city council. Stafford took her seat on the council on January 10, 1961 and held the position for 14 years, longer than any one else. She stepped down the year her son Tracy won a spot on the council.

Since the city's earliest days John Miller, former Pennsylvanian and dedicated volunteer fireman, had closed down his radio shop and put out his cigar to respond to the sound of the fire alarm. In 1960 he



Wilton Manors Volunteer Fire Department, Labor Day, 1959. Left to right, first row: Don Corry, Danny Kester, Charlie Saxer, Fred Haberstick; second row: Ray Hazlet, Al Walker, Clifford Cole, Clarence Sills; third row: Joe Nutero, Dick Boyer and Bob Perrigo.

- Wilton Manors Fire Department

became the sixth fire chief in Wilton Manors' first eight years as a city. Miller, a beloved figure who was known as "coach," would provide real continuity by holding the position for the next two decades. He relinquished his post in 1980 to his protege Richard Rothe.

On March 4, 1962 reporter Ken Strickland wrote in *The Miami Herald*: "Only 15 years after its incorporation this central Broward City has nearly reached its saturation point....With 90 per cent of the land within its limits now developed there is little room for additional growth....But residents of the self-contained community could not care less. They pay among the lowest taxes in the county yet have full city services."

The story pointed out that from 1957 through 1961 the total value of new construction had decreased each year. Residential building constituted roughly two-third of all construction projects in 1961.

One effect of the diminishing supply of land had been to enhance the value of existing homes, Mayor Price said. The value of many of the homes, sold originally for about \$15,000, had appreciated to the \$18,000-24,000 range, the mayor said.

"New families are attracted to the city by its desirable location, shopping and recreation facilities, and, of course, low taxes," the article continued. "Price predicted property in the city will continue to rise in value as long as the community retains its present character. And its contented residents aren't likely to let it change."

Wilton Manors had good reason to be pleased with itself on the Fourth of July, 1961. Fifteen-year-old Gary Patchen, who lived at 2132 NW Fifth Avenue, had raced three times in the Fort Lauderdale Soap Box Derby. He had come in fourth, third and second. Would his fourth try mean a first for him in "Dixie," his sleek, black, home-made racing car?

A crowd of 15,000 gathered near the Las Olas Bridge, one of the few places in Broward County that could provide enough slope for the cars which were powered not by engines but by gravity. Cheered on by his parents Bob and Louise Patchen, Gary won.

"I put in a lot of work on my car but you just can't imagine what it feels like to actually win after coming so close," said Gary. One of his rewards was a trip to Akron, Ohio, to compete against state champions in the national championship before a crowd of 100,000. Again, his performance was impressive. He finished second in the nation.

In 1963 Wilton Manors didn't change but America did. On November 22, 1963 the country's young president, John F. Kennedy, was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. His murder ushered in a decade of turmoil and strife throughout the country and, some feel, ended America's "age of innocence."

Though 1964 was generally quiet in Wilton Manors, another symbol of the past came crashing down that year. Part of the Wilton Drive gate



Built in 1925 the gateway tower later served as home to Mr. and Mrs. Scott Mace.

- Jean French

had been demolished in 1957 to make way for a drive-in restaurant. Now most of what remained was taken down to permit the construction of a service station at Five Points.

"It's wicked to take it down with all those birds in it," a resident told *The Herald*. "There are hundreds of sparrows in there — it's something of a bird sanctuary."

The gate came down but the city, home to flocks of

parrots since 1952, softened the blow by declaring Wilton Manors officially a "Bird Sanctuary."

By 1965 Mayor Price was happy to report that city household and voter registration statistics at last indicated that the population had reached the 10,000 level, claimed enthusiastically but erroneously eight years earlier. Registered voters totaled 4,867 within the city's two-square mile area.

Three main arteries serving Wilton Manors were also being widened and improved, the mayor reported. Oakland Park Boulevard and Andrews Avenue were being four-laned and sidewalks were being completed. In addition Old Dixie Highway was being widened.

Kathleen Klein, Wilton Manors librarian since the library's founding in 1957, retired in 1966. Mary Jane Schmidt, one of the early volunteers and then an employee, was named director of the library, a position she held for the next 18 years.

That summer Grace and Robert Newton opened their pink, seven-bedroom home, complete with intercom, garden and swimming pool, to four mentally retarded children. In their venture they were aided by the Broward County Association for Retarded Children and the Wilton Manors Baptist Church.

"We've never had any children of our own," said Mrs. Newton. "And when we decided to open our home to mentally retarded, we had no training in the field. But it's been the turning point in our lives."

The Newtons named their home the Turning Point, the Newton Home for Special Children.

"When we built here in 1947, Wilton Manors was still pioneer country," said Mrs. Newton. "There were just a few gravel roads, a lot of rattlesnakes, and about 50 people in the whole area. We helped organize a civic association and two churches. I became a charter member of the Wilton Manors Woman's Club and worked with the

Girl Scouts. I watched Wilton Manors change from a village to a city. Two years ago, we felt that our work in the community was finished... Then a neighbor spoke to us about taking in mentally retarded children. We accepted the challenge."

In the spring of 1966 Harold Gair, Wilton Manors' third police chief, resigned due to ill health. Captain Felix Miller served as acting chief while the city looked for a man to fill a job that was becoming increasingly complex as the city and the area around it swelled in population. For the post Mayor Price and the city council promoted from within by picking the man who scored highest in a competitive examination.

Sergeant Bernard Scott, who hailed from St. Louis, joined the Wilton Manors Police Department in 1958. Five years later he was promoted to sergeant and then prior to his appointment as chief he served as acting captain. In heading up a police force of 21, he became at 30 the youngest police chief in Florida.

As a young patrolman in the early 60s the new chief encountered a chastening experience. Scott was directing traffic at Five Points when a man driving by stopped and asked him for directions to Federal Highway. Scott pointed east down Twenty-sixth Street, only to learn minutes later about a robbery at a local finance company. From the description he recognized the car and the suspect.

"I gave an armed robbery suspect directions out of town," said Scott, who went on to hold the position of chief for 22 years.

On January 28, 1968 George Richardson, who had moved to Wilton Manors in 1936, was named county judge by Governor Claude Kirk. Two years later he would move to a higher tribunal when he was named to the Circuit Court. Richardson, a 1951 graduate of the University of Miami Law School, had practiced law from the Richardson Golf Course clubhouse while continuing to help his mother Rachel run the family golf course, a Wilton Manors landmark from the earliest days.

"I once got off a tractor out on the golf course to draw up a will," he said. Richardson had previously served as a city councilman and as city attorney.

Two days after Richardson's appointment the city received the sad news that Mayor Price had died at 59 at Holy Cross Hospital after an illness of several weeks. A native of Lykens, Pennsylvania, Price came to Wilton Manors in the early 1950s with his family. He served on the city council from 1956-60. Elected mayor in 1960, he held the office for six years.

At the time of his death, Price, who was employed as jail steward by the Broward County Sheriff's Department, was president of the Broward County League of Municipalities. He was also a member of

the Wilton Manors Kiwanis Club, the volunteer fire department and a former president of the Wilton Manors Chamber of Commerce.

City Council President Marvin Meacham assumed the duties of the city's chief executive until the upcoming March 12 elections. Elected as mayor to succeed Price was Gerald Thompson, a man who would play a major role in the political life not only of Wilton Manors but of all Broward County. A former bartender and swimming pool contractor, Thompson was elected to the city council in 1964, a post he held until voters named him mayor, a position he held for six years.

For Wilton Manors the Sixties had been a memorable decade, capped off when the Census of 1970 finally confirmed what Mayor Price had confidently claimed in 1965. The official figures for Wilton Manors finally broke through to the lofty level of 10,948 residents.

Growth, however, was by no means limited to the city on Middle River. As both Fort Lauderdale and Oakland Park grew, Wilton Manors found itself in the midst of a large metropolitan area, which shared with the smaller city increased traffic and crime problems.

In fact, by the early 70s Fort Lauderdale was casting covetous eyes on Wilton Manors. In the city's *Town Crier* newsletter, Mayor Thompson sent out a call to voters to "SAVE OUR CITY." To persuade residents to oppose a takeover by Fort Lauderdale, he called for them to support Wilton Manors in a straw vote to be



Fire Chief John "Coach" Miller, with Richard Rothe, who succeeded him, Mike, and Larry Archacki, president, Wilton Manors Volunteer Fire Department.

- Wilton Manors Fire Department

conducted at the time of the March 9, 1971 city elections. Wrote the mayor:

"Perhaps the 11th Commandment should be—
'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors municipal treasury.' The Power Structure of our Southern neighbor (Fort Lauderdale) is again requesting the Legislature to abolish Wilton Manors. We would then share in the cost of Fort Lauderdale's past and future inefficiency, with a minority voice in decisions."

The voters said decisively that they preferred to remain independent, a town of their own. In addition, from a field of 11 candidates they voted to reelect to the council Marcia Stafford, with 1509 votes, and to vote in Arthur Welling, with 656 votes, for the first of his three terms on the city board. These would lead the Wilton Manors realtor to the mayoralty in 1976.



In 1966 Police Chief Harold Gair, resigned to be followed by Felix Miller as acting chief and then by Bernard Scott, who became the youngest chief in Florida. Left to right on front row. Scott, Miller, Gair, Laddie Marolt and Raymond Saxon. Behind Gair stands Perry Hempstead, who would be involved in the shootout with a Chevrolet Impala.

- Wilton Manors Police Department

In December, 1971 one Gerard John Schaefer, Jr., a recent graduate of the University of Florida, was appointed to the Wilton Manors Police Department after attending the Broward County police academy at Broward Community College. He did not last long, fired in early 1972 by Chief Scott for hanging a man upside down from beneath a bridge. The chief observed the young patrolman had "some very strange ideas about law enforcement."

How strange his ideas were emerged the following year when he was convicted for two mutilation killings. He was suspected of possibly as many as 28 murders altogether.

Chief Scott put the experience to good use by pushing successfully for psychological testing for all applicants for jobs with WMPD.

Not all police work involved such grisly criminals. In fact, one perpetrator turned out to be not an evil felon but rather an innocent though misguided automobile. A neighbor had Joe Velasco's 1972 blue and white Chevrolet Impala running while she attempted to start her own car with jumper cables. When she tried to disconnect them, the car jumped into gear and began to run in circles in the middle of the 2700 block of NE First Way.

Velasco chased his car and tried to open the door. He was knocked to the ground. After the fiendish Chevy knocked down a palm tree and headed straight for an undefended carport, Lieutenant Perry Hempstead gave the order to police sharpshooter Jay Bell to fire.

Bell fired four shotgun blasts into the open hood. The auto stopped just short of the carport.

"No warning shots were fired," wrote Ana Maria Fenimore in the *Fort Lauderdale News*

"And now everybody asks us all the time if we shoot Fords," said Lieutenant Hempstead. "I think I'm ready to move into the office for awhile."

Casualties: Velasco whose 14 stitches to the leg, black eye and bump on the head added up to a \$300 hospital bill and the Chevy, with \$400 worth of miscellaneous repairs.

In 1974, Gerald Thompson won election to the Broward County Commission. He held the post for 22 years, longer than any other politician in county history. He served also as chairman of the commission on four different occasions, also a record.

Educator James E. Maurer moved up from the city council to succeed Thompson as mayor. Maurer, who would be elected three times, resigned during his first term when he was appointed superintendent of schools for Broward County in 1975.

Named to succeed him was Eugene Metzger, who with his brother Philip had developed Deer Creek in Deerfield Beach. A native of Columbus, Ohio, who had attended graduate school at the University of Miami, Metzger had previously served six years as a city councilman. His tour of duty as mayor lasted less than a year but he remembers those years fondly.

"There were very few problems in those days," said Metzger, who lived on Jenada Isle at the northwest end of town. "The city was not burdened with indebtedness, the town had a strong tax base and we had no appreciable crime or density problems. People genuinely liked the town. It was a great time and a great community to raise a family."



Richard Rothe, first ranger at Colohatchee Park

- Wilton Manors
Parks & Recreation

Metzger held office at the midpoint of the decade and as it turned out it proved to be a high point, too. For the city 1975 was a very good year. Some 400 businesses were now operating in Wilton Manors, which could also point to six churches, two grammar schools, 10 service clubs and both Boy and Girl Scout Troops. Of the city's 5,916 residences, 2,740 were single-family homes, 540 duplexes, 2,467 condominium units and 169 mobile homes. In addition, the city estimated its population at 15,000, a figure with which the next two official censuses would disagree.



The 1970 city commission. Left to right, seated, Marcia Stafford, Mayor Gerald Thompson, Eugene Metzger, and Marvin Meacham; standing, William Smith, City Attorney William Miller, Frank Starling and James Maurer. - Marcia Stafford

It was the year Colohatchee Natural Park opened on the south fork of Middle River. The park offered visitors a journey into six-and-a-half acres of an unspoiled mangrove swamp harking back to the days when the Indians gave the river the name Colohatchee. Land for the park had been purchased in 1972 with an \$85,000 grant from the federal government's Open Space Land Program and a \$10,00 grant from the Florida Department of Natural Resources.

Elevated boardwalks led through the red and black mangroves into a world of birds, raccoons, crabs and butterflies, even an occasional alligator. Supplementing the natural amenities were picnic tables, play areas and a boat ramp at NE Fifteenth Avenue.

That same year the city decided its history was worth preserving, too. The Wilton Manors Historical Society held its first membership meeting at City Hall on September 15, 1975. President Diane Thompson, wife of Gerry Thompson, presented Honorary Lifetime Memberships to pioneers Dave Turner, Mrs. James Boyd, Mrs. Robert Newton, Merle Slagle and Alvar Hagen and to city attorney William Miller for his work in drafting and obtaining the society's charter.

It was the year, too, when one of the city's most durable political leaders stepped down. After eight years as city clerk Marcia Stafford had held the office of city council member for 14 years, longer than anyone else, before or since. Elected to the seat she vacated was her son Tracy, who had grown up in a home where much of the city's business had been conducted in the 1950s.

The following year her daughter Nancy, a 1975 journalism graduate from the University of Florida, entered the Miss Fort Lauderdale Beauty Contest, wearing an \$8 dress she and her mother bought at a thrift ship.

Her hope was to win a scholarship which would send her on to graduate school. It sent her much farther.

After winning the Fort Lauderdale contest, Nancy, journeyed up to Orlando to compete in the state contest. This time she was wearing a \$100 dress. Tall — five feet nine — blue-eyed and blonde, she brought back to Wilton Manors the proud title of Miss Florida. And with it a springboard into TV commercials and then starring roles in television dramas. After the TV series *St. Elsewhere*, where she played the role of the icy hospital administrator Joan Halloran, then moved on to *Matlock* where for six years she played opposite Andy Griffith as Michelle Thomas.



In 1976 Nancy Stafford, shown here in a later picture, won the coveted title of Miss Florida. - Nancy Stafford

She has starred in two television movies, *Deadly Invasion* and *Moment of Truth: A Child Too Many*, and has appeared too on the acclaimed *Frazier*. Her old friends still see her often on TV commercials for City Furniture — and back home in Wilton Manors. She returns regularly to visit her mother, brother and friends. She lives now in Marina del Rey with her minister husband Larry Myers.

In 1976 Arthur Welling succeeded Gene Metzger as mayor. Joining him on the city council was Sandra Jedlicka, administrative assistant to Broward County Property Appraiser William Markham. Jedlicka had come to Florida in 1957. She majored in English at the University of Miami. In 1978 she married a fellow Broward County resident, Robert Steen.

The year Welling and Jedlicka assumed office the city completed negotiations to acquire a significant piece of Wilton Drive property from Food Fair, which had indicated a year earlier that it would be going out of business. Purchased for



In 1976 the city hosted its first seven-mile run. - Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

\$429,426 were four-and-a-half acres of land and the existing building, containing 22,256 square feet of floor area. The property's appraised value was \$540,000.

"Your City Council feels that the acquisition of this property is essential in order to provide for the needs of the city now and in the future," wrote City Council President Fred B. Fetzer in the *Town Crier*. Possible future uses included a new and larger public library, municipal parking area, city office space and expanded recreation and park facilities.

On New Year's Eve, 1978 the city hosted its first Wilton Manors Seven Mile Foot Race. Some 600 runners set out from Mickel Field. Dean Reinke, of Bloomington, Indiana, crossed the finish line in 35 minutes, roughly 45 minutes ahead of the runner-up. Mayor Welling, who played football at Syracuse University because, he said, he was too slow for track, watched from the sidelines.

"I might run next year," he said.

In looking back on his two terms as mayor, Mayor Welling concluded that the two achievements of which he was most proud were the consolidation of the city's two sewer bonds into one and the improvements on Northeast Twenty-Sixth Street from Federal Highway to Five Points.

Chapter 7

Into the 1980s

In the 1980 election Jim Maurer regained his seat as mayor of a Wilton Manors whose growth was finally beginning to slow down. The Census of 1980 reported a population of 12,718 residents, still well below the 15,000 estimated in 1975. By now most of the city was, as developers say, "built out." Growth would necessarily be slow since the city was essentially an island.

In late May the city was confronted with an event that revealed how much a part Wilton Manors had become of the changing South Florida scene. A suspicious neighbor called Wilton Manors police to report that a large, high-powered Excaliber-type boat had docked at Middle River at a home in the 2400 block of NE Eighteenth Avenue in the night. A sizable number of people crept stealthily from the boat and disappeared into the house. Police immediately notified the U.S. Border Patrol. A squad of five policemen, including young Steve Kenneth, surrounded the house to prevent suspected smugglers and aliens from escaping.

By early afternoon the Border Patrol had obtained a warrant. Police and the patrol moved in on the waterfront home. They arrested three smugglers and 14 Colombian immigrants. The aliens had been smuggled to Wilton Manors from Bimini at prices ranging from \$600 to \$800 a person.

In 1981 Frank Starling retired after 21 years as city administrator. Tracy Stafford resigned his seat on the council to seek, successfully, the administrator's job. To fill the seat left vacant by Stafford the council picked a man who had orbited the earth 11 times as an astronaut.

Don Eisele, a 51-year-old stockbroker, lived on Jenada Isle on the west side of town, an area which was not represented on the council at that time. This was one major factor in picking him. The other was that as an astronaut he had already demonstrated "the right stuff."

Said Eisele of his new job, "I don't know what's on the horizon."

That year the mayor was struggling with a large problem, large in every sense of the word. His weight had climbed to 276 pounds, too much for even his six-foot-two frame. Cecil Nall, director of parks and recreation, came up with a workable idea, not just for the mayor but for everyone battling a weight problem. In conjunction with the American

Heart Association and the Broward County Dietetic Association, he formed the Wilton Manors Lose-a-Ton Club. Nearly 300 men and women signed up for the program. One of them was Mayor Maurer.

Diets were tailored to each individual and weekly seminars were held to motivate club members to continue sensible eating. Club members received discount cards for health food stores. Exercise rooms and the recreation department conducted special exercise events. At the halfway point the weight loss was just short of 500 pounds.

The final weigh-in was held November 21, 1981 at City Hall. About 250 of the original 300 showed up. The total were 2,087, just enough to claim a successful program. But the effort wasn't over. Other members came in within a few days and the figure rose to 2,340 pounds, an average of eight pounds per person.

The individual who lost the most weight turned out to be the mayor. He trimmed off 38 pounds. T-shirts showed up in the city, reading Wilton Manors —THE TOWN THAT LOST A TON.

In 1982 voters elected to the city council the grandson of the village's first mayor. Bill Turner owned and operated Taylor & Turner, a pest control company. Elected to the council at the same time was Diane Renollet Cline, who hailed from Columbus, Ohio. Manager of the Hyatt Fruit Company, she was elected city council president in August, 1982, a post she held until November, 1984, when the new City Charter abolished the position. At that time she became the first vice mayor in the city's history.

In addition, she briefly held the title of acting mayor to usher in a confusing period in the town's relatively calm political history. In late June of 1983 Mayor Maurer failed to attend a scheduled council meeting. He had not been seen at City Hall for a week, and according to press accounts, had left no word that he might be away. Officials were concerned enough to seek a legal opinion on when the office would be declared vacant. Council President Cline became for a brief time the city's acting mayor, signing necessary authorizations to keep the machinery of government running. After two weeks Maurer telephoned City Administrator Scott Miller to tell him he had been taking a vacation.



Mayor Robert DuBree cruising through Wilton Manors.
- Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

“A guy can’t even take a vacation without somebody looking for him,” said the mayor.

In a sense the event was the first act of a Who’s the Mayor? play. A more complicated one would appear the following year. In 1984 two residents declared to run for mayor, Robert DuBree, owner of one of the town’s two motels, the Ponte Rio, and Sam Stevens, director of building and community development for the City of Tamarac.

Since Florida has a “resign-to-run” law, Floyd Rogers, a resident, announced he would take legal action to remove Stevens, an official of another city, from the ballot. Enough confusion reigned to leave the issue unresolved until one day before the election. By the time a Broward Circuit Court judge disqualified Stevens it was too late to remove his name from the ballot. When the votes were counted, Stevens had 1606. DuBree trailed with 1517. Still, as the only candidate running legally, he was the mayor. The nature of his victory, however, left him with a considerable burden in serving as mayor.

One of his burdens was the strange case of Vikki Kittles, whose arrest in May, 1985 brought back memories of the “Bird Lady” in the tower. In response to complaints from neighbors five Wilton Manors police. Sergeant Don Ridenhour and four other Wilton Manors police officers, two veterinarians and Detective Sherry Schlueter, an animal abuse specialist with the Broward Sheriff’s Office entered Kittles’ home at 1818 NE Twenty-Seventh Street. They found an incredible menagerie — 37 dogs, three cats and two horses.

Ellen Stein, writing in the *News/Sun-Sentinel*, called it a “tumultuous scene highlighted by dozens of loudly barking dogs, a horse that rebelled against being loaded into a trailer and about 30 neighbors looking on.” Kittles was charged with two counts of cruelty to animals.

“We spent all day Thursday trying to negotiate with her to peacefully put the animals where they’d be well taken of,” said Mayor DuBree. “We really didn’t want to lock the lady up.”

Vikki Kittles landed Wilton Manors in the pages of the *National Enquirer* before the summer was over. On orders of a Broward County judge she moved out of the house and eventually out of the area.

In 1984 Marcia Ellington became only the third librarian in the town’s history, succeeding Mary Schmidt, retiring after 16 years. Ellington, who came to Wilton Manors as a child in 1959, joined the library staff in 1968. She oversaw the library’s move into an increasingly technological world in which the institution’s traditional collection of books was joined by two highly popular additions — videos of famous motion pictures and audiobooks.

Wilton Manors celebrated its 1985 Fourth of July with the biggest fire in its history. At 3.58 A.M. Florida Power and Light received a call that one of the eight Manor Grove Village condominiums was burning.



The city's biggest fire occurred on the Fourth of July, 1985, when one of the eight condominiums at Manor Grove Village burned down.

- Wilton Manors Fire Department

Seventy people living in Building H fled into the night, nine of them with injuries. For the rest of the night Wilton Manors' volunteer firefighters under the leadership of Fire Chief Richard Rothe fought the blaze that swept through the attic crawl space and destroyed the building. The cause of the fire turned out to be a short circuit in a storage room.

In March of 1986, the election pitted Mayor DuBree against Vice-mayor Diane Cline and former

Councilman Tracy Stafford. DuBree received 746 votes, well below Stafford's 984. Elected at the same time were Richard Mills III, a 31-year-old lawyer, and Susan Olson, a 38-year-old real estate agent, who captured seats on the council. Olson, a descendant of Floridians although she hailed from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, came to Broward County in 1967. She brought with her an unusual distinction. In preparation for its fiftieth anniversary in 1997, the city looked for any of its residents who were born on the birthday of Wilton Manors. They found just one — Susan Olson, born in Pittsfield on May 13, 1947.

During DuBree's administration the citizens of Wilton Manors concluded the time had come for a new logo. It could be used, among other things, on city limits signs, welcoming people who crossed any of the municipality's 11 bridges into the city. A contest was held to create a new design.

The contest winner, Norma Rollinson, a 30-year resident, had on occasion heard Wilton Manors referred to as "the island city." To many, this was not immediately apparent. Most of the bridges



Canoe races have become an annual event on the Middle River.

- Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

crossed the river at narrow locations with very little elevation. They lacked the "bridge feel." Motorists felt as though they were simply driving along a city street which crossed a canal. But a close look at a map clearly reveals a city surrounded by water except for one small section north of the river, extending up to Oakland Park Boulevard.

Better than a look at a map is a boat trip around the island. The river,

narrow at the bridges, is in places 200 feet wide and 16 feet deep. Attractive, comfortable homes face much of the waterfront, where residents have planted bougainvillea, magnolias, papayas, citrus and a wide variety of palms. On the north fork, particularly near today's Kiwanis Park, manatees appear in the winter. Mangroves and cypresses grow in the wilder sections of the river, farther to the west side of the island. A boat cruising through the waters startles kingfishers, osprey and great blue herons.

A graduate in advertising art from Pratt Institute in New York, Rollinson decided the "island city" theme might work for a logo. "I realized the signs would be at bridges because you enter Wilton Manors by bridge," she said. "We're unique because we're an island city. I thought it would be interesting to focus on that."

Her design, created without any city funding, beckoned visitors with "Welcome to WILTON MANORS — Island City," above a drawing of a small island with a healthy stand of palm trees.

In September, 1987 the troubled life of the world-renowned bass guitarist Jaco Pastorius came to an end in the Island City. Hours after making an appearance at Sunrise Musical Theatre Pastorius lay unconscious in a pool of blood outside the Midnight Bottle Club on Wilton Drive. He had been refused entry at 4.20 A.M. because he was not a member. He kicked the front door and tried to hit the manager, Luc Havan. In the ensuing fight Pastorius was beaten and died six days later at Broward General Medical Center. Havan, pleading guilty to manslaughter, was sentenced to 21 months in jail.

Pastorius was only 35 at the time of his death but he had already lived a lengthy lifetime. A graduate of nearby Northeast High School in Oakland Park, he had played with such well known bands and performers as Weather Report, Al DeMeola and Joni Mitchell. In the last years of his young life he was often in trouble with South Florida police.

A happier story involving the arts began to unfold in 1988 when Brian Smith, producer, director, actor, opened his Off Broadway on E. 26th Street. He remodeled the former Manors Cinema, an art movie house, converting it into a small equity theater seating 300.



Papa, John de Groot's one man play about Ernest Hemingway, received its world premiere at Off Broadway on 26th Street. Left to right, William Hindman, as Hemingway, playwright de Groot and Brian Smith, director and owner of the theater.

- Brian Smith

Smith introduced playgoers to the kind of theater he wanted to bring to Wilton Manors with the premiere performance of *Papa*, a one-man play about Ernest Hemingway. What made the debut even more satisfying was the identity of the playwright — John de Groot, a resident of Wilton Manors. The play went on to a successful run in another Off Broadway, this one in New York. De Groot is well known in South Florida as a journalist with the *Sun-Sentinel*. In 1971 he was a member of a team of reporters who earned a Pulitzer Prize for the *Akron Beacon Journal* for its coverage of the Kent State shootings in Ohio.

Nearing its first decade of operation, Off Broadway on E. 26th Street has brought in such eminent stage actresses as Eileen Heckart and showcased many professional actors from South Florida. Off Broadway, the area's only for-profit regional theater, has in a sense become the leading edge of the city's later thrust to develop as a theater and art center.

In 1989 Horton/Jones Electrical Contractors, Inc., donated to the city the oldest house in Wilton Manors. Built by Willingham, probably in the fall of 1925, it was located east of his first plat at 1225 Northwest Twenty-Fourth Street. Horton/Jones bought the property in 1988 for \$67,500.

"We wanted it for the land," said Tom Jones. "It was overgrown with trees. You could not see this house when you went down the street."

A year-and-a-half later the company, needed the space occupied by the old house, donated it to the city for possible use as headquarters for the Wilton Manors Historical Society. Four years later the house was demolished after the city failed to take any further action.

In the final year of the decade Bernard Scott stepped down as chief of police after three decades. The city appointed as its new chief Steve Kenneth, at 38 a man who had grown up in the city. The son of Fred and Christine Kenneth, he attended Wilton Manors Elementary, Sunrise Middle and Fort Lauderdale High School before moving on to Broward Community College and the University of Central Florida, earning his degree in law enforcement. In 1973 he joined the police force in his home town.



Becky Thacker, assistant director, Department of Parks and Recreation, manages Wilton Manors display at Broward County Pioneer Days.

- Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

“He knows the city from a perspective that’s rare for someone coming in,” said Mayor Stafford. “I think he’s got a lot of good qualities to bring to that job.”

Chief Kenneth would need those qualities. Urban Broward had grown into a metropolitan area with well over a million people and a daunting range and variety of problems and crimes. Policing the area in cities large and small, like Wilton Manors, had become a difficult and demanding job.

Chapter 7

Into the 1980s (Supplement)

DEDICATIONS

On February 11, 1984, the Police Department renovation and addition was dedicated with Mayor James E. Mauer, Council President Diane R. Cline, Council Vice-President William D. Turner, Council Members James A. Grady, Loren J. "Duke" Maltby and Jack R. Zeman officiating. The expanded Police Department allowed for an improved radio dispatch area, records storage, interrogation room, briefing room and offices for all administrative officers.

On October 5, 1985, a dedication ceremony was held to commemorate the Wilton Drive improvement project. The rebuilding of Wilton Drive was recognized on this date with a gala celebration; however it was not the first but rather the third rebuilding of the Drive. In 1925, Wilton Drive became the focal point of an ambitious project for a high grade subdivision. A dirt road was transformed into a paved street with sidewalks and light standards. The developer, E. J. Willingham, planned to line the Drive with stately two story homes and Royal palm trees. The second rebuilding of the Drive came in 1955, when Wilton Drive – now a state road – was widened from two lanes to four lanes, and drainage was installed. And today, imagine the surprise of Mr. Willingham if he could see the Drive with five lanes, medians, landscaping, and lined – not with stately homes – but with businesses that comprise the heart of Wilton Manors.

Following the Wilton Drive Dedication and parade the new city seal was dedicated at the City Hall Council Chambers with Mayor Robert H. DuBree, Sr., Vice Mayor Diane R. Cline, and Council Members William D. Turner, Martin Bush and Sherod (Rab) Rouser officiating. The history and development of Wilton Manors is a fascinating story of community pride and effort on the part of its citizens. Although many changes have taken place over the years, it still remains the type of community where people are interested in making it "the best place to live". The new Seal represents the re-vitalization of our pride as was the renovation of Wilton Drive which was dedicated earlier in the day. Over fifty residents and businesses contributed to the City Seal Fund so that the Seal might forever continue to show our community pride and the City it represents.

Wilton Manors City Council

1997



Left to Right: Richard Pratt, Vice Mayor Jack Seiler, Mayor King Wilkinson, John Fiore and Gloria O'Gorman.

Mayor King Wilkinson

- First elected in 1994
- Re-elected in 1996
- Member of Broward Economic Development Council TV, Art and Film Commission
- Proponent for development of the Island City Arts Center
- Advocate for use of grant dollars to help revitalize the City

Vice Mayor Jack Seiler

- Appointed to city Council to finish term of Sue Olson in 1993
- Elected in 1994
- Advocate to improve residential and commercial property values
- Proponent of privatization of some services such as EMS
- Development of Arts and Entertainment District

Council Member John Fiore

- First elected in 1988
- Vice-mayor from 1990-92
- Re-elected in 1992 and 1996
- Advocate for strong grants program beginning in 1989
- Proposed annual canoe race
- Instrumental in development of Kiwanis Park and renovation of Mickel Field

Council Member Gloria O'Gorman

- First elected in 1990
- Vice-Mayor from 1994-96
- Re-elected in 1994
- Advocate for many new social service programs in the city
- Serves on County Community Development Commission
- Active committee member of various boards for Broward League of Cities

Council Member Richard Pratt

- First elected in 1990
- Vice-Mayor from 1992-94
- Re-elected in 1996
- Proponent of strong and effective Code Enforcement
- Member of Broward County Community Action Agency
- Advocate of the use of advanced technologies in city government

Chapter 8

Half a Century

Wilton Manors launched the final decade of the twentieth century by naming its first woman mayor. Sandra Jedlicka Steen, who had served on the city council for nearly ten years, won by the easiest route imaginable — no one ran against her.



Tracy Stafford's election to the Florida House of Representatives meant a big celebration in Wilton Manors. Left to right, Tracy Stafford, Georgia Mealer, Lillian Jedlicka, her daughter Mayor Sandy Jedlicka Steen and the winner's sister, actress Nancy Stafford. - Sandra J. Steen

Steen announced she would run for the office in the March 13, 1990 election after Tracy Stafford resigned as mayor to run for the Florida State Legislature. He won to become the first Wilton Manors resident elected as a state representative, then followed up his victory by winning two more terms. Meanwhile, the deadline to declare for the office of mayor passed at noon on January 16. No one else signed up. Steen automatically became mayor, said City Clerk Angela Scott.

"It still hasn't sunk in," said Mayor Steen later that January afternoon. "I never thought I'd be unopposed since this was the first time I was running for mayor. I was all geared up for a big race."

Her principal objectives, the new mayor said, would be to continue the current council's policy on cleaning up blighted areas and enforcing strict code regulation. Mayor Steen was heavily involved, too, in city beautification and in the Kids in Distress program. In her first term she was joined by two new council members, Gloria O'Gorman and Richard Pratt, winners in the March elections.

The Census of 1990 delivered a jolt to the city. Its official figures showed a population of 11,804, a decline of close to a thousand people. Since the amount of funding a city receives from federal and state



Staff members celebrate new improvements at Hagen Park.
- Wilton Manors
Parks & Recreation

sources is based in part on census figures, a lower number creates funding problems.

"We feel their statistics are not an accurate number," said Mayor Steen. "We have younger families moving in with children."

In its counter claim Wilton Manors contended its actual population was 2,000 higher. The city persuaded the federal government to add 500 people to

the census total, thus increasing its funding.

By this time the Island City was facing the inevitable problems of any town that has become "built out." The tax base had reached a stalemate, city officials reported. As a result, property owners faced a 26 percent property tax increase in the 1990-91 city budget.

As a young, growing town in the late 40s and early 50s, Wilton Manors could appeal to buyers of new homes as a city with no taxes. Now that the city was 99 percent "built out," residents confronted a different reality.

In 1991 the Florida Department of Transportation proposed changes in traffic patterns at Five Points. A 1987 study, the DOT said, showed that the intersection was confusing and subject to accidents and traffic tie-ups. The plans called for widening Dixie Highway and realigning Twenty-Sixth Street at the intersection.

More than 100 business owners packed City Hall to protest to the City Council that the changes would harm the city's businesses. "If it isn't broke, don't fix it," said Realtor George Abromats to a round of applause. The council voted unanimously to reject the DOT plan.

In August, 1992 a deadly hurricane struck the Southeast Florida coast. Hurricane Andrew's deadliest damage was inflicted on south Dade County but Wilton Manors also felt the effects of its winds. By the first day of September the costs to the city had already totaled \$565,528.

To add to the Bird Lady and Vikki Kittles, the city in 1993 acquired a self-styled Wilton Manors Snake Man. Wray Parr, a Canadian who lived in the summer in Nova Scotia, housed 18 snakes in a vehicle which he called a motor home. The city disagreed.

"It looks like a bus, it drives like a bus," said Mayor Steen, elected for a second term in 1992. "He can register it as a luxury condo, but it's still a bus."

The Snake Man's problems stemmed from the city code which prohibits parking of buses in residential neighborhoods. Parr's feud with the city went ballistic when Snake Man gave his vehicle a \$2,000

paint job featuring outrageous graphics, described by Jennifer B. Heit in *XS* as “A mighty python hovers over a burning Wilton Manors City Hall as rats named after City Council members scurry from the building.”

“He’s a character out of a Stephen King novel,” said Harold Horne, the city’s community services director. Horne earned the questionable honor of having a rat named after him.

The feud ended in the fall of 1994. Word was received from Nova Scotia that the Snake Man had died at his home of a heart attack. He was just 44.

King Wilkinson, active in Wilton Manors real estate, succeeded Sandy Steen as mayor in 1994. Born in Casco, Maine, he moved in 1962 to Cocoa Beach, Florida, where he worked in the space program before becoming a general contractor. In 1967 he moved to Wilton Manors. Reelected mayor in 1996, he held the city’s highest position as Wilton Manors moved into its fiftieth anniversary year. In 1995 Dr. Robert Levy became the city manager.

A major project in the mid-90s was the expansion of the waterfront Kiwanis Park in the Highland Estates section on the north fork of the Middle River. It is an area visited by manatees in the winter and popular with canoeists and bird watchers. In Prohibition days, in the 1920s and the early 1930s, moonshiners visited the north fork’s two uninhabited islands, where they operated illegal whiskey stills.

The north fork had been known as Snook Creek in the days of the Seminole Wars. No snook have been pulled from its waters in recent years, said Richard Rothe, director of parks and recreation. He did observe, however, that on Christmas Day, 1996, Kyle Archacki, eight-



Wilton Manors celebrates opening of Kiwanis Park in a big way. Speakers included City Manager Robert Levy (lower left), and Mayor King Wilkinson (top left). State Senator Jim Scott welcomes an enthusiastic group who will make good use of the park (above).

- Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

year-old nephew of David Archacki, public services superintendent, caught a snook off Townhouse Isle in the waters of the south fork.

As Wilton Manors neared the end of its first half century, the city turned its attention to enhancing its cultural life and in the process revitalizing its downtown. Brian Smith's Off Broadway on 26th Street had already shown that the area could support a quality theater.

The city's 1995 adventure in the world of cinema gave it a tasty introduction, if not a memorable movie. The grandson of Carl Hiaasen, a pioneer resident, wrote a book called *Striptease*, set primarily in Fort Lauderdale. Hollywood liked the later Carl Hiaasen's outrageously funny book and decided to produce a motion picture, starring Demi Moore and featuring a noted South Florida actor, Burt Reynolds. Most of the movie was shot in South Florida, much of it in Broward County. One location that was needed was a mobile home community to serve as a home for the stripper-star's fictional sister-in-law.

Next to the railroad tracks in Wilton Manors sat the Middle River Trailer Park, owned by Mary Yawt and her family for more than 40 years. Just the place for the film crew to work, thought Mayor Wilkinson. The movie's producers agreed.

"It's our funkier trailer park," said the mayor. "I'm not proud of that, but I'm very proud they did their filming here in Wilton Manors."

The mayor spent two days in the park, watching the filming. He later worked as an extra in a scene shot at the Sheraton Bal Harbour Resort in Dade County. Citing such features as mangroves, water and parks, he said, "We invite movies to film here and I'll do everything I can to help them."

The cultural thrust of Wilton Manors goes far beyond the shooting of occasional movie sequences. Arts and entertainment have been designated a major vehicle to revive the city's downtown, said City Manager Bob Levy. He sees "the Coconut Grove of Broward County," rising along Wilton Drive.

"Not highbrow," said the Harvard-educated Levy. "We're looking for cafes and places where ordinary people can enjoy an evening." Art galleries and upscale nightclubs would also be part of the mix sought by city officials.

The key to the rejuvenation of downtown will be the Island City Arts Center, located in the 2020 building on Wilton Drive, in a building which once housed the Food Fair supermarket. The project is being developed in partnership with the Fort Lauderdale Children's Theatre and the Fort Lauderdale Players.

Mayor Wilkinson, looking ahead to the twenty-first century, wrote: "What an opportunity we now have! A new millennium dawns! The foundation we build today will propel us into the future. As Wilton Manors evolves, we shift from an Indian hunting and fishing ground

to an agrarian economy — to a bedroom community — to a true urban city. Our predecessors built their ‘village’ based on the need for appropriate housing, roads that carried us quickly to our destinations, and small centers where community members could shop, dine and chat with one another. The age of mega-stores, mega-malls and gridlock has caused us to look at different solutions and ideals.”

Wilton Manors has been a low-profile town, home to only a handful of celebrities, most notably Nancy Stafford, astronaut Don Eisele and Rocky Marciano, former heavyweight boxing champion who lived on the west side of town in the 1950s.

“Wilton Drive is one of the few places in Broward County that has that hometown, downtown feeling,” said Harold Horne, community services director, underscoring the importance so many residents attach to the city’s small town image.

“We’re a small town surrounded by a big city,” said Rick Miller, owner and operator with his wife Sherry of Barton and Miller Cleaners, founded in 1956 by his father and Buster Barton. “But we still have that small town atmosphere.”

Said Dr. Robert Helmholdt, an orthodontist who has practiced in the city for more than two decades: “Wilton Manors is a community of solid, hard-working family people. It’s like a Norman Rockwell community.”

“It’s always been home,” said Bill Turner, grandson of Dave Turner and former city councilman. “It’s a place where my father has been. It’s comforting.”

Tony Oliviera, who runs the Courtyard Cafe on Wilton Drive, said: “You’re in an oasis. It’s peaceful and tranquil.”

What would Ned Willingham think if he could see the city that has grown from the small residential suburb he started in 1925? He saw it then as a small upscale community with beautiful homes fronting on Wilton Boulevard, a small Dixie Highway business district serving the residents and a hotel rising on the boulevard for the winter tourists he thought would flock to the island. Only he never really thought of it as an island, more as an extension of Fort Lauderdale.

Today the city’s finest homes, some estimated as valued as roughly a \$350,000, are located not on Ned’s Wilton Boulevard but along the island’s eastern waterfront. Wilton Boulevard, restricted to “exclusively residential” use in his original plan, became Wilton Drive, the city’s principal business district. The land designated for the hotel is now the site of Wilton Discount Beverages.

Five Points has become the landmark of Wilton Manors, not because of Willingham’s impressive and expensive towers at the town’s entrance but because of what a Florida Department of Transportation engineer called “an uncommon design.”

A conservative southerner from a small Georgia city, Willingham

wanted a community restricted to Caucasians, not a surprising attitude for a white Georgian born during the Civil War. Today he would see — and obviously not comprehend — the rich ethnic and national mix that characterizes the Wilton Manors of the 1990s. He would see the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and would note that the Covenant Presbyterian Church, the city's first, now opened its doors for additional Haitian services and on Sunday evenings Brazilian services conducted in Portuguese. Ned would also see restaurants serving Chinese, Thai, Mexican, Polish, Turkish food, and an English pub honoring the bard himself, Will Shakespeare. Of course, he would also find seafood and southern barbecue.

One thing Ned, who liked to think of himself as a man with artistic sensibilities, would have liked is the city's move toward enhanced cultural facilities. One of his 1926 ads, featuring the theme "Art in Development," compares Wilton Manors to "the masterpiece of the artist," then states, "E.J.Willingham, the artist, developed Wilton Manors, the masterpiece."

The city's second founding father, Dave Turner, enjoyed a much later view of his town. Honored by the city on his eight-second birthday, he told Jeff Forgoston, a *Fort Lauderdale News* reporter, about a man who had sought permission years ago to build a junkyard on undeveloped land on Wilton Drive.

"I told him that we're not building a junk city," said Turner. "We set up a policy that we'd have a good, clean town. I think we've pretty much kept that promise."

If he were still around to see the town at its fiftieth anniversary on May 13, 1997, he would like some things, dislike others, but at least he, unlike Ned Willingham, would recognize his town — and wish it Happy Birthday.



Middle River

- Wilton Manors Parks & Recreation

City of Wilton Manors Officials

Mayors

Dave Turner	1947-1952	Eugene Metzger	1975-1976
Perry Mickel	1952-1955	Arthur Welling	1976-1980
J. Frank Starling	1955-1960	Robert DuBree	1984-1986
Harold T.Price	1960-1968	Tracy Stafford	1986-1990
Gerald Thompson	1968-1974	Sandra J. Steen	1990-1994
James E. Maurer	1974-1975	King Wilkinson	1994-
	1980-1984		

City Council Members

Alvar Hagen	1947-1952	Eugene Metzger	1968-1974
Arthur Chabot	1947-1952	James Maurer	1968-1974
William Robinson	1947-1952		1979-1980
J. Marvin Brown	1947-1952	Arthur Welling	1971-1976
James Boyd	1947-1952	Samuel Stevens	1974-1979
James Dean	1952-1953	Fred B. Fetzer	1974-1979
Earle Middleton	1952-1953	Wayne Goltz	1974-1976
J. Frank Starling	1952-1955	Tracy Stafford	1975-1981
Earl Gurney	1952-1954	Sandra Jedlicka Steen	1976-1982
Charles Saxer	1953-1955		1985-1986
Clarence Riggs	1953-1956		1988-1990
George Richardson	1954-1956	Jack Zeman	1976-1984
Fred Stevens	1955-1958	Michael B. Curran	1979-1984
William Joslin	1955-1958	James Grady	1981-1982
Vernon Burnell	1956-1960	Don Eisele	1981-1982
Harold T. Price	1956-1960	Diane Cline	1982-1986
Robert Schmidt	1958-1960	William Turner	1982-1986
Carl Blimly	1958-1961	Loren "Duke" Maltby	1982-1984
Howard Goll	1959-1962	Sherod "Rab" Rouser	1985-1985
Gerald McCauley	1960-1964	Marvin Bush	1984-1988
George Nichols	1960-1963	Wayne Musgrave	1984-1986
John Hanrahan	1960-1965	Susan Olson	1986-1993

Marcia Stafford	1961-1975	Richard Mills III	1986-1990
William Smith	1962-1974	John Fiore	1988-
Gerald Thompson	1964-1968	Gloria O’Gorman	1990-
Lawrence Sullivan	1966-1968	Richard Pratt	1990-
Marvin Meacham	1965-1971	Jack Seiler	1993-

City Administrators/Managers

J. Frank Starling	1960-1981	Dale Reith	1986-1986
Tracy Stafford	1981-1982	Wallace A. Payne	1987-1993
J. Scott Miller	1982-1985	Donald Lusk	1994-1994
Bernard Scott(acting)	1985-1986	Dr. Robert A. Levy	1995-

City Clerks

Kathryn Johnson	1947-1950	Debbie Basone	1980-1982
Mary Harvey	1950-1952	Deanne J. Doherty	1982-1984
Marcia Stafford	1952-1960	Diane Hominick	1984-1984
J. Frank Starling	1960-1978	Sharon Birken	1984-1988
Dorothy Grosser	1978-1979	Angela Scott	1988-
Margaret Mitchell	1979-1980		

Police Chiefs

Richard Beaney	1952-1957	Felix Miller(acting)	1966-1966
Thomas Brace	1957-1961	Bernard Scott	1966-1989
Harold Gair	1961-1966	Steve Kenneth	1989-

Fire Chiefs

C. Kass	1952-1952	John S. Miller	960-1980
E. Novak	1952-1953	Richard Rothe	1980-1995
Ed Thomas	1953-1954	James Ridout	1995-1997
Wally Wakely	1954-1959	Tim Keefe	1997-
Al Walker	1959-1960		

Directors, Department of Parks and Recreation

James McGivern	Cecil Nall
Richard Geisler	Daniel Keefe
Robert Saxon	Richard Rothe

Acknowledgements

Many Wilton Manors people have contributed their time, reminiscences, scrapbooks, pictures, clippings, ideas, suggestions and good will. We will try to list them all but if we miss you, our apologies for the oversight and our thanks anyway for helping.

The starting place, of course, is the Wilton Manors 50th Birthday Blue Ribbon Committee: Sandy Steen, chair; Rick Perry, vice chair; Debra Sinkle, recording secretary; Diane Renollet Cline; Celeste Ellich; Gail Fitzgerald; Virginia Flaherty; Arlene Lancaster; Michael Pierce; George Richardson, and Helen Richardson — and, of course, my principal contact and coordinator with the City of Wilton Manors, Becky Thacker, director of recreation.

The list continues with Marcia Stafford, Harold Horne, William Turner, Dorothy Bryan, William Miller, Alicia Zachman, Jim Dean, Eugene Metzger, Arthur Welling, Tracy Stafford, Nancy Stafford, City Manager Bob Levy, Dan Keefe, Angela Scott, Susan Olson, Richard Rothe, Tim Keefe, Marcia Ellington and her capable staff at the Wilton Manors Public Library, Linda Noel, Gretchen Gettemy, Police Chief Steve Kenneth, Officer Joan Kon, Bill Wetzel, David Archacki, John de Groot, Brian Smith, Tinker Connelly and Mayor King Wilkinson.

Again, invaluable help from the Broward County Historical Commission, in particular, Rodney Dillon, Helen Landers and Barbara Poleo, who at the eleventh hour uncovered a 1925 sales brochure used by the Willingham Company to launch Wilton Manors. The Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, with staunch support from Dan Hobby and Sue Gillis, provided a source of early clippings about the town and a number of photographs. Anne H. Rogers, Genealogical and Historical Room, Middle Georgia Regional Library, Macon, Georgia, located valuable information on the founder, E.J. Willingham.

A major source of information, particularly in the early years, was the Broward County Public Library, with its microfilm file dating back to the 1920s when the community was started. In more recent years good coverage has been provided by the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, the *Sun-Sentinel* and *The Miami Herald*.

