

This is a compilation of two articles about Perry and Dorothea Mickel, early Wilton Manors pioneers. The primary source of the information is from Dorothea Mickel.



# WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORICAL NOTES

2008/2013

### Perry and Dorothea Mickel

Edited by Mary Ulm, July 2022

Wilton Manors Historical Society

## The Mickel's History in Wilton Manors

By Mrs. Dorothea Mickel, 1974 for Broward County Historical Commission Pioneer Days

Perry Mickel came to Fort Lauderdale in September of 1924 to manage the Glades Restaurant on the river front by Swaggerty's Garage, and owned by Mrs. Vail and Mrs. Richardson. It was a wet month - Perry wore his bathing suit to work. I followed in October with my mother and six months old baby. With the "boom" exploding Perry soon went into the Real Estate business and I went back to nursing for Dr. Edwards.

Dr. Edwards and Dr. Harrison Walker were from Indianapolis where I had trained and often nursed for them. Dr. Lingerman had a brother who was an Ear, Nose & Throat man in Indianapolis. Dr. Lingerman came later. The Hospital was where the Pine Crest School was for so many years.

Perry worked out of E.J. Willingham's office and later bought and sold a number of Lauderdale Beach lots. After the boom bubble burst, he built a garage apartment on a lot across from where the Sea Shore Hotel stands. This was the summer of '26. Here we weathered the 1926 hurricane, and sitting in our car, watched our apt. blow down. It was later raised and a first floor built under it.

When the "rum runners" began unloading their cargo on this part of the beach, the Coast Guard refused to consider that any one live on the beach and Perry decided the shooting was too close for comfort. (We sold the Beach House to Al Capone gang and they burned it later.)

In the meantime, Mr. Willingham's house in Wilton Manors was deteriorating for lack of care and offered it to us as a place to live and keep in shape. We moved to Wilton Manors in 1928 in time for the 1928 blow that did so much damage on the lake.

Bill Robinson family were with us for storm. In the meantime, Dr. Walker had gone to Hollywood and open a small hospital near the beach and I went there as head nurse so when the 1928 Blow came, I was there working and commuting.

Perry was gradually working into the building business with Charles Shaffer, a builder. Perry had worked for the Red Cross during the clean-up days of Sept. 1926.

With the Willingham house we inherited two colored men who lived over the garage. The acreage back of the house had been in orange groves, but citrus cancer had been found and all the trees had been uprooted and burned. With two men to keep occupied Perry now began a small venture of farming. The fall of 1928 I was asked to apply for the position of County School Nurse and was accepted and given a model-T car to drive, along with a health card for every school child in Broward County. I spent one day a week at larger schools, one day every two weeks at Dania, Hollywood, Davie and Pompano once a month, also Deerfield.

Not long after I accepted the school nursing position, Dr. Walker closed the little Hospital in Hollywood and went to Miami Beach. Dr. Edwards had already gone there to the Allison Hospital.

By 1929-'30-'31 the depression was getting worse, Perry bought a cow and farmed about 25 acres and then in summers would do repair jobs-as building was at a stand-still. He gradually increased his farming activities and went as far as Boca Raton to plant beans and squash. After '31 I went back to private duty nursing as the school work was only paying \$75.00 a month.

Sometime during these lean years, the land north of Middle River and east of Wilton Drive sold for taxes. Perry was instrumental in retrieving this for the Willinghams by selling the house on Fifth Avenue to Frank Musebeck and the house at the entrance gates to George Smith, the Furniture store owner. Frank had the tire shop on down town Andrews. He also rescued Mr. Willingham's property in Idlywild by insisting that the bank would discount the mortgage they held for such a small sum that Tom Fleming insisted that they wouldn't take it, but Perry urged him to try and when he came back..he said "My God, Perry, they took it!".

Perry was now milking several cows and delivering milk to the Oakland Park area, along with his farming. The next few years were lean but we were much better off than many. Then things began to get better. In 1937 we obtained some acreage - west of Andrews. In 1938 the Willingham property sold to (George) Richardson for a golf course.

Perry built a house there on our acreage and while he was building it, I did night duty with a private patient. At that time the Hospital was on S. E. 18th St. in what had been called a Battle Creek Sanatorium. The place was small. Surgery up steps, no elevator...and Fairchild and Fannin took turns coming with their stretchers to take the patients upstairs to surgery. Every Saturday night was an emergency. The curve on Federal Highway called "Dead Man's Curve" was taking its toll and brain concussion cases with their Cheyn-Stokes Respiration could be heard all thru the Hospital. The old apartment House where Broward General now stands was being rejuvenated into a hospital and many a nurse helped wash down wood-work and steps, as Ann Boyd once said, "They never told that when they wrote up the Hospital Story". I was not nursing at the time.

In 1938 we moved into our new home. The suitcase full of worthless mortgages which we had stored all the 10 years was officially burned, a remnant of the "boom" days.

The later days of Wilton Manors should not be so difficult to obtain. We did our part by sub-dividing and selling lots.

The enthusiasm of the early pioneers of Wilton Manors working together to build a Community Building, later a library and volunteer work done on the Ball Parks and Recreation facilities is something to be remembered.

## **Perry Mickel – A True Pioneer**

By Paul Kuta and Benjamin Little, Wilton Manors Historical Society, 2013

Chef, realtor, farmer, builder, and civic volunteer, Perry Mickel played a key role rescuing Wilton Manors from the dual disasters of the housing crash and hurricane of 1926. He was one of the Wilton Manors Pioneers instrumental in creating the Village and then City of Wilton Manors and in its development during the first three decades.

Born in Missouri in 1893, Mickel served in the Army in World War I. While living near Indianapolis, Indiana, he met and married Dorothea Applegate, a trained nurse, in the early 1920s. The newly married couple moved to Muncie where Perry worked as a chef in a restaurant at a lakeside resort. When that enterprise failed, the Mickels decided to move to Fort Lauderdale in 1924 during the period of the land boom in South Florida.

In a 1976 interview with the Wilton Manors Historical Society, Dorothea Mickel said her first impressions of Fort Lauderdale were of an area with lots of scrub pines and palmettos, a small population center along the New River, and hordes of land speculators from the north living in tents. Perry first worked as a chef and restaurant manager, but soon got the real estate fever. The Mickels were living in a garage apartment on the beach when the 1926 hurricane struck. The land bust and economic depression soon followed.

One of the ambitious land developments that was put on hold was E. J. Willingham's Wilton Manors, a 345-acre residential subdivision north of the Middle River in Fort Lauderdale.



With the land bust underway, Willingham returned first to his home state of Georgia in 1926 and then died in March 1928 at the age of 66 in Asheville, NC. Management of the Willingham Development Co. was left in the hands of his son, E.J., Jr., and attorney Tom Fleming.

To help them sell the vacant land and retire some of the debt, they recruited Perry Mickel. In 1928, the Mickels and their three children moved into the vacant Willingham house at 1937 Wilton Drive (where Richardson Historic Park is now located). They lived there for six years, and Perry Mickel ran a small dairy farm while selling real estate. During this time, Dorothea Mickel worked as a public health nurse in the county school system. In 1938, George Richardson, Sr. purchased the house and surrounding 40 acres for use as a golf course.

During the 1930s, Mickel bought the tax liens on 48 acres of property west of Andrews Avenue. In 1938, he built a house and outbuildings on the corner of what today is N.W. 3rd Avenue and N.W. 25th Street and operated a dairy and vegetable farm. He later became a general contractor. In a 1952 newspaper interview, Mickel said that he farmed in winter and built homes in the summer "to try to make enough to pay off what I lost in farming in the winter."

During the 1940s, Perry Mickel was engaged in many civic activities in the burgeoning community. He was a founding member of the Wilton Manors Civic Association in 1946 and assisted with the incorporation of the Village of Wilton Manors in 1947. His good common sense and dry humor made him a popular figure.

Nancy Sawallis, who provided the photo of the Mickel house shown in this article, reported: "My husband, Bob and I (newly married and very "green") were fortunate to become neighbors of the Mickel family in 1947 when we purchased a small lot adjacent to their farm. Perry and his sons helped us pour the concrete slab for the tiny cottage we built there. [Called "Skunk Hollow"] They gave us vegetables from the farm, and we felt we were eating 'high off the hog!'

"Dorothea was capable, feisty and fun. Perry had great common sense and a wry sense of humor. They became dear friends and mentors for us."

In 1952, Mickel was elected as the second Mayor of Wilton Manors, and served in the unpaid job until 1955. During his term in office, he presided over the development of the first city charter and State Legislature approval for the incorporation of the independent City of Wilton Manors in June 1953. The Police Department was created during Mickel's tenure. He also witnessed an extraordinary boom in land development in the Island City. In 1952 alone, the value of construction was said to have approached \$1 million--especially with the development on either side of N.E. 26th Street to the new bridge to Federal Highway which opened that December. Mickel also began planning for a new city hall.



After leaving elected office in 1955, Perry Mickel essentially retired while continuing to sell off much of his land. In that year, he first leased and then sold 2 and a half acres of land near Powerline Road for use as the ball field which still bears his name. Beginning in 1956, Mickel and his wife began spending an increasing amount of time in Asheville, North Carolina where their daughter lived and where they built a house in 1965. Perry died there in 1968; and Dorothea moved there permanently in 1972, passing away in 1981.

The N.E. 15th Avenue bridge at the South Fork of the Middle River is also named for Perry Mickel.

**Editor's note:** Some facts have been corrected based on information obtained by WMHS after the original publication date in 2013. MGU - 06/2022

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