



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL NOTES

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JAMES FRANK STARLING CITY GOVERNMENT PIONEER

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J. Frank Starling became Wilton Manors' first City Administrator on a temporary basis in 1960 and stayed on until his retirement in 1981. He served the entire time without a contract. While City Administrator (changed in later years to City Manager), Starling also was the City Clerk, Treasurer, Purchasing Agent, and Elections Supervisor. He did all of this for a salary of \$23,530 in the late 1970's.

Starling was well prepared for his job because he was elected as the Businessmen's Candidate to the 2nd Wilton Manors City Council in March 1952. He served as a City Council member until November 1955 when--at age 37--he was elected as the 3rd Mayor of Wilton Manors, serving in that position until January 1960. In the 1955 race for Mayor, Starling beat Council Member (and later County Judge) George Richardson, Jr. by just 7 votes, proving true the old adage that every vote counts.

Frank Starling came to city government with some practical business experience and a background of hard work. He was born in Key West, Florida in 1918 and raised in Miami. He started out as a farmer, and at one time farmed more than 1,000 acres in Pompano Beach and southern Palm Beach County, selling vegetables to northern markets. He served in the Army Air Corps in World War II, and then became a lifelong member of the American Legion.

Starling came to Wilton Manors in 1946 and, in partnership with Lamar "Max" Braddy, opened the community's first supermarket, Manor Market, at 2205 Wilton Drive. The importance of Manor Market to a village of several hundred people cannot be overemphasized. It not only provided an essential product, but served as a gathering place for social and business exchange. In 1952, Braddy and Starling undertook a \$75,000 expansion of Manor Market, which included a 2-acre parking lot at its rear. At its 3-day grand reopening in



November 1952, the supermarket was said to have attracted 20,000 people from the surrounding area. By 1958, Braddy and Starling had sold Manor Market and opened an auto muffler and tailpipe installation business at 2223 Wilton Drive. After a business fallout and Braddy's untimely death, Starling became a partner in the opening of the Manor Flame restaurant which became Chardees in 1990. Today, the structure still stands as part of the Plaza Dee North strip shopping center on Wilton Drive adjacent to N.E. 6th Avenue.

Frank Starling was an unpaid elected official when the City of Wilton Manors was incorporated in 1953. He was a "jack of all trades" in helping to oversee the expansion of the city and the development of its infrastructure. As City Administrator, he supervised the organization of a growing city staff to serve the needs of a city which by 1960 had a population of 8,257--an eightfold increase in 10 years! Throughout his career, he was a real civic booster who worked actively to enlist private voluntary labor and monetary donations for such worthy projects as parks and civic events.

Starling and his first wife had one daughter and lived at 2515 N.E. 6th Avenue (around the corner from Manor Market). After his wife died, he eventually remarried; and he and his second wife Ethel had a daughter and son and resided at 501 N.E. 28th Street. Starling died on November 13, 1995 at age 77. In honor of his 29 years of public service, his funeral cortege drove past the Wilton Manors City Hall where the city employees were arrayed outside paying tribute to his memory and contributions.