



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL NOTES

FEBRUARY 2011

MARCIA STAFFORD

WILTON MANORS FIRST COUNCILWOMAN

OBITUARY

By Mary Ulm

Wilton Manors Historical Society

Wilton Manors Pioneer Marcia Stafford died on January 15, 2011 at age 89. A fourth generation Floridian born in Miami, she served as a City of Wilton Manors elected official for over two decades, first as City Clerk for eight years and then as a Council Member for over 14 years. No other Wilton Manors elected official exceeds her tenure.

Marcia, her husband Leslie Stafford, and one-year old son Tracy moved to Wilton Manors in 1949 when the village was two years old. Leslie Stafford, an office manager with the Eli Witt Cigar and Tobacco Company, performed much of the construction on the family home on NE 25th Street. Marcia took great pride in her husband's handy work.

Village Mayor Dave Turner had donated land upon which to build an elementary school, but county school board officials balked at the idea that a school was needed in Wilton Manors. With other young mothers, Marcia persisted in trying to change that opinion, aided at times by the restless fidgeting and vocalizations of young toddler Tracy.

The school board relented and Wilton Manors Elementary School opened in 1951. Marcia enjoyed telling the story of her and other parents preparing the school ground for opening. At one point during their landscaping they began unearthing hundreds of empty liquor bottles. These were apparently the legacy of what early residents politely called a "gentlemen's club" of questionable repute, that had once operated across the street.

In 1952, at the urging of Mayor Dave Turner, Stafford ran and won a three-way race for City Clerk – a position she held until 1960. While Council meetings were held at the Village Hall, much of the rest of City business was conducted at the Stafford home until the first City Hall with real offices opened in 1957. Thus, daughter Nancy, born in 1954, and young Tracy spent their formative years amidst the constant comings-and-goings of Wilton Manors citizens and politicians.

In 1961, Marcia became the first woman to serve on the Wilton Manors City Council. An intelligent, witty, and charismatic public servant, she held the citizens' confidence for a

record 14 years and 10 months. “I can think of no one who gathered as much good will for the City as Marcia Stafford,” recalls long-time resident Nancy Sawallis. “Marcia was well liked by everyone.” Wilton Manors Woman’s Club President Gwen Thompson agrees, saying: “She was a wonderful inspiration and a long-time club member.”

No doubt Marcia could have continued her long and successful run as the only female on the City Council had she not chosen a different course for her career. In 1975, she resigned as Councilwoman to support son Tracy’s bid for a position on that body; a seat he ultimately won.



During her long tenure as an elected public official, Marcia Stafford participated in the addition of a water system, sewer system, roads, parks and recreation facilities as the city’s population grew from 1,500 in 1952 to well over 10,000 in 1975. However, her “true claim to fame”, as she wrote in a short biography in 1991, was her and Leslie’s children, “...who reflect the home town atmosphere in which they grew up”. Son Tracy has led a distinguished career as an attorney, Wilton Manors City Council Member and Mayor, and State Representative. Daughter Nancy was crowned Miss Florida in 1976. She is an accomplished actress, motivational speaker, and author.

After leaving elected office, Marcia continued to enrich the Wilton Manors community by

teaching kindergarten and reading to children in the Wilton Manors public library. Leslie Stafford retired in 1977 and Marcia joined him in retirement several years later. Leslie died in 1995.

Modest to the end, and ahead of her time in combining career and family, Marcia Stafford has left an indelible stamp on the city in which she resided for more than 60 years.

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JANUARY 2014

MARCIA STAFFORD TREE DEDICATION ISLAND CITY PARK PRESERVE JANUARY 11, 2014

By Benjamin B. Little
Wilton Manors Historical Society

On January 11, 2014, the City of Wilton Manors held a ceremony to dedicate a tree to Marcia Stafford, the longest serving civil servant in the history of Wilton Manors. In attendance were her son, Tracy Stafford, her daughter Nancy Stafford, the current Mayor, numerous former Mayors, City Commissioners, current and past, former co-workers, friends, and residents who remembered her.

On behalf of the Historical Society, Benjamin Little delivered the following remarks in her honor.

For "Founding Fathers," we have Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and others. Here in Wilton Manors, our "Founding Fathers" were Dave Turner, Perry Mickel, Al Hagen, James Dean, and Marcia Stafford.

These were the folks who got Wilton Manors from a bump in the road to a city. In the 1950's, '60's and '70's, politics and governance was a man's game, but Mrs. Stafford was clearly the extremely effective exception.

Between 1953 and 1976 there were all sorts of controversies. From what I have been able to determine from the public record, she remained above the fray and seemed to have provided a steadying influence which got us through it all.

Mrs. Stafford was elected to the post of City Clerk in 1952. When the position of Clerk became appointive, she ran for City Council in 1961, a seat she held for nearly 15 years. This would be a total of 23 years of elective service to the City. A record which stands today.

Today, we have a nice City Hall on Wilton Drive, with a nice foyer, and helpful public servants behind glass to help residents attend to business. From 1952 to July 1957 all this



was handled from Mrs. Stafford's kitchen in the Stafford's home on NE 25th Street. By my count, we now have seven full time employees doing her job. Yes, the City is larger and more complex, but now we have computers.

The Historical Society has a fair number of pictures of Mrs. Stafford, many generously provide by her children Nancy and Tracy. As a collection, these pictures are very interesting. Various City Councils are clearly "the men's club." And there she sits, very much a force which could not be ignored. She is renowned for her work with children in Wilton Manors. Perhaps her time spent reading to children inoculated her from the political games occupying peoples' attention. Her skills at keeping children under control at the library had to have been useful with the City Council.

Other pictures depict a lady you really wished was YOUR mother. Kind, intelligent, devoted. I was not fortunate enough to have met her, but she was much loved by many.

Turner, Hagen, Mickel, and Dean were important to the development of Wilton Manors because they were businessmen/developers. Mrs. Stafford was a wife, mother, and an example of someone who was selflessly devoted to the community. Arguably, she is the first and best example of a long line, continuing today, of residents who make Wilton Manors work.

Mrs. Stafford's legacy lives on here in Wilton Manors, but one must not overlook that her devotion to "service" has been continued with her children, Tracy and Nancy. We, and this tree, will continue to thrive under Mrs. Stafford's watchful eye.



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