



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL NOTES

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Citizen Pride and Effort

Wilton Manors was Born in 1924

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By HAROLD T. PRICE
(Mayor of Wilton Manors)^{1 2}

What is now the City of Wilton Manors originated in 1924 when the family of E. J. Willingham moved here from Byron, Georgia.

It was a small community originated by Willingham, who named it Wilton Manors to honor and perpetuate his wife's family name.³

It seems development activities stopped after the 1926 hurricane. The Willinghams returned to Georgia, where they died in 1928.

The first meeting to organize a town was held April 28, 1947. There were eighty-six freeholders who signed the original petition in favor of establishing a municipal government and ten in opposition.

Wilton Manors was incorporated as a village in the year 1947, and in 1953 it received its charter by an act of the state legislature as the City of Wilton Manors.

The history of its development is a fascinating story of community pride and effort on the part of its citizens.

The first town meetings were held in a small store building on Wilton Drive.⁴

Later, the Wilton Manors Civic Association was organized and a meeting hall was built by volunteer labor and materials donated by many of its citizens.

The land was donated by the first mayor, Dave Turner. This building is now maintained as the Wilton Manors Public Library.

Wilton Manors annexed Highland Estates in 1951, after which its first business district and home development increased rapidly.



The city's first, major public works was its water system in 1952, which now serves in excess of 3,500 water customers.

Cultural and recreational facilities developed along the same lines of personal and group interest, work and donation. The recreation program, now recognized by county, state and national organizations as a model, was created by volunteers, including the Wilton Manors Sports Club who developed Mickel Field on land leased from our second mayor, Perry Mickel at \$1.00 per year.⁵

Alvar Hagen donated the land for the Hagen Park development, which was completed through the interest and donations of civic organizations and many citizens.

The library, now housed in the original town hall, evolved through the determined efforts of individuals and groups and had its beginning through a city-wide book drive with space donated in the first grocery store.⁶ The original building was enlarged and improved after the present city hall was built in 1957. It is now recognized as a fine cultural asset with a high rating in library circles.

In addition to library and recreation facilities, the present city hall is complete with police and fire departments, council chambers, Public Works Department, Building Department, Administrative and Accounting Departments, with adequate planning for future expansion.

The Police Department, which began with a single police deputy, now has a staff of nineteen, plus six school patrol members and a police auxiliary of ten members. With the assistance of police activity organizations, many safety, emergency and youth programs are available to the citizens.

The Volunteer Fire Department, which originally served Highland-Estates, is still 100 percent volunteer with thirty-five I members whose personal efforts considerably assisted the city into the development of a modern, well-equipped facility.

Growth from 300 residents in 1947 to the present 10,000, with 4,867 registered voters, in an area of two square miles, also has been due to the convenience of its modern shopping centers, which have affected the economy considerably. An annual cigarette tax of \$178,000 is a big factor in the low ad valorem tax millage.

There was no ad valorem tax until January 1, 1957 when a seven-mill assessment went into effect. The city now operates on a three-mill tax rate. There are six churches, two grammar schools, 10 service clubs and boy and girl scout troops within the city.

The city has a mayor-five council member form of government. On odd numbered years, two members of council are elected for two year terms of office. The mayor and three members of council are elected to terms of office of two years in even years.

At the present time, three main arteries through Wilton Manors are being widened and improved:

Oakland Park Boulevard is being four-laned with center lighting and sidewalks; Andrews Avenue is being four-laned complete with sidewalks; and Old Dixie Highway is also being widened and improved.

In keeping with this overall picture, the city also plans for this fiscal year construction of sidewalks on other main thoroughfares.

Mayors have been Dave Turner, April 28, 1947 to March 3, 1952; Perry Mickel, March 3, 1953 to Nov. 2, 1955; J. Frank Starling, Nov 2, 1955 to Jan. 12, 1960; Harold T. Price, Jan. 12, 1960 to present.

1 Harold Price was Mayor from January 12, 1960–January 31, 1968. He owned a gas station which would later be Wings and Things and is now Sushi Rock on Wilton Drive.

2 Footnotes added by the Wilton Manors Historical Society, Benjamin B. Little. Some punctuation has been corrected.

3 Eula Willingham's maiden name was Felton, not Wilton. Most probably "Wilton" is a concatenation of "Willingham" and "Felton."

4 Alvar Hagen's office.

5 The City purchased the land in 1960 for \$21,000.

6 A key shop at the back of Manor Market.

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