



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL NOTES

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The 26th Street Bridge to Federal Highway

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Wilton Manors Historical Society

William C. Collier moved here from Texas about 1893, and he established an orange orchard on the northeast of what is now the Eastside. The entire area was sparsely populated and devoted to farming.

About 1920, the “Florida Frenzy” started, with a wild building boom. Edward J. (Ned) Willingham arrived and, after a couple of other enterprises, platted “Wilton Manors.” The northern border was Prospect Road (now NE 26th Street) from what is now Andrews Avenue to the FEC tracks and Dixie Highway. Willingham created Wilton Boulevard and Five Points. Prospect Road would have continued east to service the farms, but it did not show up on a 1929 plat of the area.

The September 25, 1952 edition of the *Wilton Oakland Sun* newspaper headlined that the link from Five Points to Federal Highway was about to start!!!! The bridge was expected to be finished in 55 days and the 28 foot wide roadway in about 60. Interestingly, the road connecting the bridge with Federal Highway had not been finalized. The entire project was privately funded by the real-estate developers on the Eastside.

The developers sponsoring the Sunday, December 21, 1952 opening festivities included Coral Gardens, Middle River Estates, and Coral Point. About 2,000 people attended the opening ceremony of the bridge. There was a drawing for prizes, available to people who had driven over the bridge. First prize was the 1952 equivalent of an expensive entertainment center. Third prize was a Schwinn bicycle. It was estimated that 4,000 cars had passed over the bridge by midnight.



This is only part of the crowd of many hundreds jamming the new 26 Street-Galt Blvd. bridge over Middle River Sunday afternoon for the grand opening of the new span which now gives Wilton Manors a direct connection with Federal highway and a shorter route to the beach. Completion of the bridge is expected to quickly accelerate the already rapid development of this entire area.

Mayor Perry Mickel opened the ceremony. Congressman Dwight Rogers acted as master of ceremonies. There were politicians from Wilton Manors, Oakland Park, and Fort Lauderdale in attendance. Rogers paid tribute to former Wilton Manors Mayor, Dave Turner who, as a local developer, had been instrumental in making the project happen, as well as contributing to its construction. The bridge was a big deal for Wilton Manors. Wilton Manors was essentially landlocked to the east. The new bridge opened all of Wilton Manors, but particularly the new development on the Eastside.

In August 1953, Dave Turner and James Dean announced plans for the construction of a \$4.5 million Manor Gates Shopping Center on both sides of 26th St. It was not built as advertised. Dean and Turner also offered to donate land to the City to build a new City Hall here, but were rebuffed by businessmen who did not want to shift the focus of “downtown” from Wilton Drive.

On August 28, 2004, the bridge was dedicated to James C. Dean, the last surviving principle of the development of the area.

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