



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICAL NOTES

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Robert W. Pearce

Pearce 5&10

Wilton Manors Pioneer - 1998

by Ron and Mary Ulm

Wilton Manors Historical Society

Ask any long-time Wilton Manors resident what they remember about their early years here and they almost always mention the **Pearce 5&10**. So, here's the rest of the story ...

Robert (Bob) Warren Pearce, moved to Wilton Manors with his wife Mary Jane and infant son Douglas in 1954. Originally from Terre Haute, Indiana, Bob attended Indiana State University, but joined the US Air Corps before he could graduate. He served in WWII as a bombardier and gunnery officer, ultimately attaining the rank of 1st Lieutenant.

After leaving the service, Bob's older brother, who was living in Vero Beach, convinced him to relocate to warm, sunny Florida and start a business. After considering various options and opportunities, Bob and Mary Jane decided on Wilton Manors because of the friendliness of the business people and residents.

In September 1954, Bob purchased a business at 2181 Wilton Drive [as of this writing, the defunct Sushi Rock] that had operated for four years as Broward 5&10, then briefly as Stone's 5&10. Bob reopened it as Pearce 5&10. He continued offering the then-unique "self-service" shopping started by Broward 5&10. Ironically, about the same time, a nationally-franchised Ben Franklin 5&10 opened directly across the street.



Bob successfully competed with the larger Ben Franklin through his friendly, personal service. *"If a customer came in with a broken item, Dad would fix it, even if purchased from a competitor. That was just the kind of guy he was,"* recalls his son Doug. Other long-time residents fondly recall how *"you could find anything at Pearce, from shoelaces to lampshades" (...or even pet turtles);* and how *"kids would ride their bikes to the store to spend their allowances"*.

Around 1960, when the Ben Franklin moved to the new Dixie Shopping Center [now Five-Points Shopping Plaza], Pearce moved across the street to their larger, vacated location at 2176 Wilton Drive [now Gables Wilton Park]. About the same time, the Pearce's moved from their rental home in central Wilton Manors to a new home on the west side, built from plans Bob personally designed.



Pearce 5&10 remained open at the second location until 1977—when, **after 23 years**, the business succumbed to competition from big-box discount stores like K-Mart and Zayre.

Pearce was an active member of his community. He was a founding member of the Wilton Manors Library, a member of the Special Police Commission, a founder and treasurer of the original Wilton Manors Chamber of Commerce, and president of the Wilton Manors Improvement Association.

Mary Jane, a graduate of Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., majored in Childhood Development. Her work experience included serving at the school library at North Andrews Garden Elementary School in Oakland Park and in the Guidance Office at Ramblewood Elementary School in Coral Springs.



The couple had four sons: Douglas, Kevin, Bradley, and Gregory. Both parents taught the boys to value education. Bob Pearce regularly held group discussions, with all four boys participating, where each was encouraged to express his views on a given topic. There were no right or wrong answers. The point of the exercise was to learn to defend an idea. All four grew up to be highly accomplished professionals. Each gained their early educational start in Wilton Manors -- attending kindergarten at Covenant Presbyterian Church, then Wilton Manors Elementary.

In 2002, after spending 48 years in Wilton Manors, Bob and Mary Jane moved to Ormond Beach, Florida. Bob Pearce died in 2005. As of this writing Mary Jane just celebrated her 100th birthday! She lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

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