

*Was there ever an airport and motor speedway in Wilton Manors?*

And the answer to this issue's question is ... well, close-by. We'll elaborate through the "McJunkin-Wilton Manors connection".



In **1919** Wilton Manors pioneer **Joseph Neville McJunkin** began farming the land on what is now the site of Ft. Lauderdale High School. He went on to acquire and operate farmland throughout Broward County. He also ran a packing house adjacent to the Colohatchee railway depot. He and his family lived at **644 NE 22nd Drive**. He later acquired more land in the Wilton Manors area. This included what is now Edgewater Estates; the SE corner of NE 26th St. & NE 15th Ave.; the CVS drugstore site; and what is now Ankr Apartments, the Shoppes of Wilton Manors and east to N.E. 20th Drive.

Most important for our story was his purchase of a 95-acre bean field just across the river from Wilton Manors—part of today's **Mills Pond Park**.

In **1946** McJunkin leased the property to a veteran pilot and flight instructor from Georgia—**Ben Bradley**. Bradley started the airfield for training pilots under the post-war GI bill. By **1953** "**Bradley Airport**" had expanded—with a 2800 ft paved runway, two hangers with space for 38 aircraft, an apron with space for several dozen more, and a combined office/restaurant/training facility. Also a racing aficionado, Bradley sublet a part of the property for construction of a paved stock car racing track—"Broward Speedway".

[The two facilities were located in the south half of Mills Pond Park—beginning at N.W. 19th St and extending to about the center of today's softball venue.]

Over the years, the airport was also a regular site for the Ringling Bros and other circuses and County Expositions. It also hosted parachute competitions. The speedway eventually switched from stock cars to quarter-midgets and go-karts. It closed in **1960** after neighbors' noise complaints.

The entire site was zoned "industrial". Ever the businessman, in **1965**, with the coming of the adjacent I-95, McJunkin decided not to renew Bradley's lease. Instead, he demolished the airport buildings and put the property up for sale for \$1 million. Bradley moved his operations to Ft. Lauderdale's new "**Executive Airport**"—where he was one of the first tenants.

The vacant McJunkin site was later acquired by the City of Ft. Lauderdale; to later became a part of Mills Pond Park (which opened in **1987**). Active and alert, and still a resident of Wilton Manors, J.N. McJunkin passed away in **1988** at the age of 95.