



# WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORICAL NOTES

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### COLOHATCHEE TRAIN STATION

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Wilton Manors Historical Society

The history of a train station in Wilton Manors is murky. Was it here? Did it move? How many stations were there? The station in Colohatchee was certainly gone before "Wilton Manors" came into existence, but it is clearly shown at NE 24th Street near Dixie Highway on two separate plats in 1910 and 1925. Was it a "train station," or merely a spot where trains stopped to pick up freight? The location near Dixie Highway and Mahannah Road (now NE 24th Street) was a central point in the little community, with the Woman's Club and a little convenience store nearby.

We've had to piece together this information from a number of sources. The Florida East Coast Railway archivist finds no references to either Colohatchee or Floranada stations, and Flagler archives do not have a lot of information about the freight side of the business. But it was there!

The entire "Colohatchee" area, from where the Fort Lauderdale High School now stands (NE 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Fort Lauderdale), north to what is now Commercial Boulevard in Oakland Park, and west to Powerline Road was devoted to farming and was sparsely populated.

The 1920 Fort Lauderdale City Directory lists about 50 people living in "Colohatchee," "[a] small settlement (PO Fort Lauderdale)."<sup>1</sup> Most are listed as farmers. The Williams' Packing House and East Coast Growers Association, fruit packers are listed, as well as the Woman's Club.

The Southeast Packing Company built a meat packing plant just north of the North Fork of the Middle River in Oakland Park in 1922.

Frank Stranahan, one of the pioneers in Fort Lauderdale, bought farmland on the southeastern tip of Colohatchee, where what is now the Coral Point Subdivision.

Immediately west of the tracks on Mahannah Road, in 1912 C. Willis "Uncle Billy" Johnson and his wife Clara built a home using three-inch Dade County pine for the floors. "Uncle Billy" farmed the land and operated a dairy.

Charles Mahannah and his family moved from Iowa and established a 35-acre farm and later a dairy east of the FEC tracks. In a 1982 interview with Cooper Kirk, Mahannah's son, Mark,<sup>2</sup> estimated that when he arrived at age ten, there may have been 30 or 40 people in the

area.

In 1907, the "*American Beekeeper Magazine*" describes O.O. Poppleton, the 'bee king of Florida' producing 16,000 pounds of honey a year, as having three apiaries; with 115 hives in Pompano, 97 in Colohatchee and 62 in Key Largo.

There was clearly a need to ship produce out of the area.

Some of these farmers seemed to have been prosperous. Motor vehicle records of the time show "Uncle Billy" Johnson driving a Chalmers five-seater, which would have been about two and a half times the price of a comparable Ford or Maxwell. George Lindsey, for whom there is no other reference, had a Grant, only slightly less expensive than a Chalmers, also in Colohatchee.

The first suggestion of a station being considered for Colohatchee is its mention on the cover of a circa 1894 FEC Field Survey book. The first 'official' documentation we have found of an FEC station at Colohatchee is in the 1903 issue of "The Official Railway Guide: North American Freight Service Edition". A 1910 plat from the area, by Oliver/Moody/Weaver, clearly shows the station labeled "Colohatchee Depot". A 1925 plat of Middle River Plaza shows the continued existence of the station in the identical location.

In February 1926, the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Palm Beach Post* both published articles about plans for building of a passenger station in Floranada. This station sounds to have been further west and a passenger station catering to the new "Floranada Club." This development was backed by the American-British Improvement Corporation. Named for "Florida" and "Canada," it was to be the Biarritz of America. There were to be spectacular estates, casinos, a huge hotel, golf and yacht clubs, as well as "affordable housing" for those with impeccable social connections and not quite the obscene wealth which would otherwise be required. Backers included "super-rich" Americans, George II, the deposed King of Greece and the Countess of Lauderdale.

Land for Floranada was assembled from Oakland Park and beach front land owned by Arthur Galt. By June 1928, Floranada had filed for bankruptcy and the land reverted to Oakland Park and Galt.

But the Colohatchee station is clearly referenced and shown as part of an artistic illustration in a 1927 Broward County tourism brochure. We have a 1948 reference from noted journalist and historian Norman Malcolm stating "This station [Colohatchee] was later moved to Oakland Park where it later burned down."; but no date for the move. Maps of the era that include the FEC do seem to show a similar transition. By 1929 there are no longer references to Colohatchee and instead references to Floranada. On maps, the FEC depot seems to still be referenced as Floranada, not Oakland Park, as late as the 1940's.

Our research supports that the Colohatchee depot operated as a shipping point for produce from the surrounding area as early as 1903. By 1922 it would also have been shipping meat from the Southeastern Packing Plant, which is directly across the river. By 1930 we can no longer find any record or recollection of the structure in Colohatchee/Wilton Manors, thus supporting Malcolm's reference that it was moved to Floranada/Oakland Park. And Oakland Park Historical Society has photos of such a station and pioneers' recollections of same that are consistent.

Moving it to Oakland Park would have put it closer to the SE Packing Plant which would not have to haul their goods across the river for shipment. And the Whidby's were on that side of the river as well. So, absent anything else, the station in Colohatchee/Wilton Manors went away around 1929.

As of 2013, there is active talk of a new "transportation corridor," with passenger service returning to the FEC line, and a station in Wilton Manors.

There is a lot of evidence:

- 1894(ca) - FEC Railway Field Survey Guide noting "Colohatchee" at "MP338" on the cover;
- 1903 - "Official Railway Guide: North American Freight Service Edition" listing a Colohatchee station on page 1047;
- 1907 - "Official Railway Guide" showing Colohatchee in the freight station listings on page 1159, but not in the FEC passenger station section [as expected];
- 1910 - Oliver/Moody/Weaver plat showing "Colohatchee Depot";
- 1911 - "Annual Report of the Railroad Commission of State of Florida" on page 149 lists an FEC station of "Colohatchee" at MP 338.3;
- 1911 - "U.S. Department of Interior, General Land Office, Map of Florida" shows "Colohatchee" as being on the FEC Railway line;
- 1911 - "Interstate Commerce Commission Reports" on freight rates on pages 780 and 782 notes rates to the Colohatchee station relative to surrounding stations;
- 1915 - "Southern Railway System Map" shows a Colohatchee stop on the FEC Railway line;
- 1916 - "Pocket Map and Shippers Guide of Florida" lists the Colohatchee station as having the following services: 'Southern Express, Prepaid Freight and Mail';
- 1919 - "Miami Metropolis" newspaper discusses meetings of farmers in Dade and Broward (seemingly sponsored by the FEC Railway) to promote the "3F Feed, Food and Forage Drive". It states "The work in Broward will be done in Ft. Lauderdale, Dania and Colohatchee";
- 1922 - "Coast Line of Broward County Florida" map (probably by the FEC RR) showing Colohatchee station and proximity to Southeastern Packing Company plant;
- 1924 - Colohatchee section of tourism brochure referencing the RR station, SE Packing Plant, Woman's Club activities and shipment of carloads of produce;
- 1925 - Colohatchee section of tourism brochure referencing "... shipping point for large quantities of produce ...";
- 1926 - "C.S. Hammond Map of Florida" shows Colohatchee on the FEC Railway line.

- 1929 - "Florida Geological Survey Map" shows Floranada on the FEC Railway line and not Colohatchee
- 1932 - "US Department of Interior Geological Survey" map showing an FEC station at Floranada and not one at Colohatchee [Floranada was already Oakland Park by then].

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<sup>1</sup> *Fort Lauderdale City Directory 1920-1921.*

<sup>2</sup> Mark Mahannah, interview by Cooper Kirk, tape recording, 15 May 1982, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Broward County Historical Commission.