

# WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## HISTORICAL NOTES

MAY 2015

### THE ISLAND CITY

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The Merriam Webster dictionary defines “island” as a tract of land surrounded by water and smaller than a continent. That would be Wilton Manors.

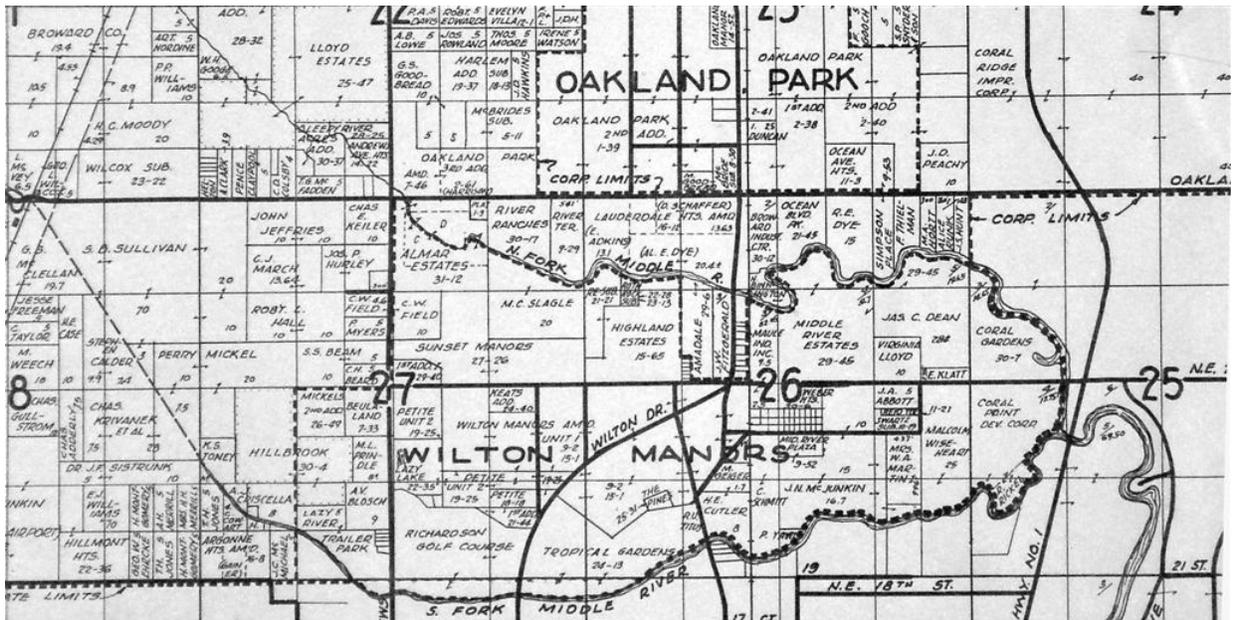
Wilton Manors is encompassed by the North and South Forks of the Middle River. The rivers start at the western tip of Jenada Isle with the North Fork flowing east and the South Fork flowing southeast and then east. They meet again at the eastern end of Wilton Manors and just south of NE 26<sup>th</sup> Street. The Middle River then takes a turn to the south just east of Wilton Manors and flows into the Intracoastal Waterway.



What is now Wilton Manors was the home to both Tequesta and Seminole Indians. Around 1900, Frank Stranahan, of Fort Lauderdale Stranahan House fame, bought farm land in the southeast corner of what would become Wilton Manors. His wife Ivy reports that the river was very clear and colorful tropical fish regularly swam with their canoe. There were alligators, bears, wildcats, and an eagle family.

In the mid-1920's Edward J. Willingham established residence. He was the developer of what would become the City of Wilton Manors. His plat suggested canals where Manor Grove is now located.

We were not always “an island.” There is a 1953 map showing the North Fork of the Middle River turning northwest at Andrews Avenue and going into Oakland Park. The South Fork of the Middle River seems to stop at Powerline Road. When the Florida Legislature created the City of Wilton Manors in 1953, it defines the southern border as the South Fork of the Middle River to Andrews Avenue and then the “Midriver Canal.” The map indicates that the river continues to about Powerline Road and then it is a straight shot northwest to Oakland Park Blvd at what is now I 95. The City's northern border was Oakland Park Blvd from where I 95 is now, east to Andrews Avenue, where it met the North Fork of the Middle River and followed that east.



Broward County Historical Commission Collection  
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 (extracted from larger map image by Wilton Manors Historical Society 10/30/08)

A 1966 map has the Midriver Canal relabeled as the South Fork of the Middle River and shows a new canal from Andrews Avenue due west to I 95, parallel to and south of Oakland Park Blvd. The old North Fork north of Oakland Park Blvd was now relabeled the “Wilton Canal” and “North Fork Middle River Canal.” The 1966 map shows Jenada Isle, platted in 1959 and canals behind houses in the southeast quadrant, as well as a couple canals in the southwest quadrant. There is no obvious tributary to the rivers at the west end other than some canals, but the Everglades started just west of I 95 and drainage is a major player.

In the mid-1980’s, it was time for a new City Logo. Norma Rollinson, a thirty-year resident and a graduate of the Pratt Institute in New York, won the contest. Her design, created without any city funding, invited visitors with “Welcome to Wilton Manors—Island City” above a drawing of a small island with a healthy stand of palm trees. These signs now greet visitors at all nine bridges into town.

The City has embraced the Rivers. Alvar Hagen, taking a cue from Willingham, built Town House Isles which he made sure were higher than the high water levels from the 1947 hurricane. The City has built parks with access to the rivers at Richardson Historic Park and Nature Preserve, Colohatchee Park, the Island City Park Preserve (which started off as Kiwanis Park), Donn Eisele Park, and Snook Creek Park.

Our participation with the rivers has not always been “above board.” In May 1980, fourteen Colombian immigrants were caught being smuggled in from Bimini on a high-powered speed boat at a house on NE 18<sup>th</sup> Ave. How many more international visitors were not caught? There are rumors of a still (or stills) during Prohibition on the little islands off of what is now the Island City Park Preserve. There is a house in Highland Estates with easy access to the North Fork with a partially concealed basement. One could imagine a nefarious purpose related to smuggling.

Every year since 1992, the City has sponsored a canoe race circumnavigating the island. Started at

then City Councilman John Fiore's suggestion, it is now a very well attended, and competitive event. This year it is on Saturday May 16<sup>th</sup>, with a picnic to follow. If you would like to check out the rivers on your own, the Atlantic Coast Kayak company rents kayaks at Richardson Park. Watch your head going under the bridges.



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