



WILTON MANORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Historical Notes

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WHY AL HAGEN MOVED TO WILTON MANORS

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What brought you to Wilton Manors? Al Hagen won a golf bet!

In 1941, Alvar (Al) Hagen was playing golf at the Fort Lauderdale Country Club (in what now is Plantation) in a foursome which included Frank Muckerman. If Hagen won the round, Muckerman would sell his land in Wilton Manors, north of the Richardson Golf Course and west of Wilton Drive, to Hagen for \$3,000. If Hagen lost, the price would be \$6,000. Muckerman had bought this eight or nine acres for \$3,000.

In 1938, Hagen, who was single, had moved to Miami and then Fort Lauderdale from Illinois upon his retirement at age 41. He had basically “loafed” his first three or four years in Florida, and played golf. As Hagen related in an interview with the Wilton Manors Historical Society in 1975, this was “the biggest golf game in my life.”

Hagen won the match and divided his newly acquired Wilton Manors property into lots. He hired contractor Clayton Leaver (whom he met through Muckerman) to build six houses at a cost of \$500 each. Only two houses were built before Hagen and Leaver were drafted to serve in World War II. Hagen sold



Wilton Manors Woman's Club Ground Breaking - April 1955
Alvar Hagen, who donated the land, Clayton Leaver, Contractor
Louama Leaver, and Virginia Hagen

the first house to Ernie Johnson for \$6,000 and lived in the second house, located on N.E. 4th Avenue behind Wilton Drive.

In 1943, Hagen bought more than 40 acres of land on the east side of Wilton Drive -- from N.E. 21st Court south to the Middle River and east almost to Dixie Highway.

Hagen married his wife Virginia (Ginny) in 1944 and they had two daughters. Ginny and her family were vacationing in a rented house on Fort Lauderdale Beach. An acquaintance met on the beach invited Ginny to a party given by Hagen's dentist, where she met Al. He invited the ladies to his house in Wilton Manors. As Ginny put it, "Al had a car, and Ginny had the gas coupons."

After the war, Hagen developed the property on the east side of Wilton Drive. The Tropical Club was a liquor store in front and a "poker room" in the rear. It is now Tropics Restaurant. About where Hagen Park is now, he built a golf driving range.

Ginny Hagen was one of the founders of the Wilton Manors Woman's Club, the land for which was donated by Hagen. Hagen also donated the land on which Hagen Park is located and was the first President of the Village Council when we incorporated in 1947 to separate us from Fort Lauderdale. He continued to serve on the Council until 1952 and on the Zoning Board into the 1970's. He was a true Wilton Manors Pioneer.

Frank Muckerman, who lost the bet, had built the Miramar Hotel on East Las Olas Boulevard and was quite wealthy. Perhaps it was his loss and Hagen's win which inspired Hagen to start on a second career and life as a land developer, husband and father.

Most of the information for this article came from an "oral history" interview conducted by Mrs. Jett Schmelz and Dianne Thompson, officers of the Wilton Manors Historical Society on August 28, 1975 at Hagen's home, 500 NE 19th Street. The Society is grateful to Joe Beard and Audio Duplicating Services for helping preserve these important interviews.

For more information on Hagen and the others who were instrumental in shaping Wilton Manors, look for the new history of Wilton Manors, due to be published in time for Christmas. Be sure to visit our website, www.WiltonManorsHistoricalSociety.org.

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