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Wilder's Park Collection : A Finding Aid

Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. Special Collections and University Archives.

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Wilder's Park Collection

A Finding Aid by
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Special Collections and Archives
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Introduction to the Collection

During the late 1990s, Robert Lee Irby—a graduate student in history at the University of South Florida—wrote his master’s thesis on the migration of retirees to St. Petersburg, Florida. As part of his research, he interviewed Fred E. Wilder, a veteran of the Second World War who moved to southeastern St. Petersburg in 1953. Wilder had acquired four acres of land at the intersection of Sixth Street and Thirty-second Avenue (formerly Bayou Lake Avenue) South. By 1954, he opened Wilder’s Trailer Park, with offices located at 770-32nd Avenue South. During the next few years, Wilder’s Park became a magnet for retirees from other areas in search of a second home for the winter season. Senior citizens made up nearly 90% of the park’s early population.¹

This site, nestled between Lake Maggiore/Dr. Martin Luther King (Ninth Street) South on the west and Tampa Bay/Sixth Street South on the east, served as an excellent location for a mobile home park in the years following World War II. By 1947, a Harry W. McCormick occupied the present site of the Wilder park, while a Lake Shore Trailer Park began operations at 800-32nd Avenue South.² After Wilder acquired the site, he developed the park with amenities not found at the earlier “Tin Can Tourist” camps of the 1920s and 1930s that had dotted Florida’s landscape, including water and sewer connections and regular garbage collection service.

By the fall of 1956, residents began to receive *Wilder’s Park News*, a newsletter highlighting events at the park. For over twenty-three years, Henry Crossley served as editor of this publication. Issues include news of pot-luck suppers, social events, classified advertisements, and various recreational activities for park members. Publication coincided with the traditional period when seasonal residents stayed at the park, usually from November through April. As of 2002, the park remains in operation at the same location, under a homeowner’s association.

Lee Irby acquired this collection of newsletters, as well as occasional lists of residents and other notices, from Fred Wilder during his thesis research. Lee donated these materials on Wilder’s behalf to the Special Collections and Archives at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg for use by future researchers. In 1999, Irby completed his thesis, entitled “Razing Gerontopolis: Green Benches, Trailer Trash, and Old People in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1910-1970.” A copy is available for researchers at the USF library in Tampa. Irby currently serves as adjunct instructor of American History at both the University of South Florida and Eckerd College’s Program for Experienced Learners.

¹ Most of this information appears in Lee Irby, “Taking Out the Trailer Trash: The Battle Over Mobile Homes in St. Petersburg, Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79 (Fall 2000): 181-200. A copy of this article appears in the appendix to this collection.

² *Polk’s 1947 St. Petersburg (Pinellas County, Fla.) City Directory* (Richmond, Va.: R.L. Polk & Company).

Restrictions/Preservation Note

The newsletters and other papers in this collection occupy two acid-free document boxes. While preservation measures may slow the physical deterioration of such items, these steps cannot prevent damage from occurring. To prevent further damage to the fragile materials in this collection, avoid placing any additional stress on the paper fibers by folding or creasing newspapers or other materials, or by exposing them to light for an extended period of time. Please report any tears or other damage so that library staff may take appropriate preservation or conservation measures. While no restrictions limit access to this collection, library staff will evaluate photocopying or digitization requests on an individual basis to ensure the long-term preservation of this unique collection. Patrons using this collection must adhere to copyright and fair-use guidelines and provide proper citation of sources appearing in their research.

Provenance of the Wilder's Park Collection

This collection falls under the Local and Regional History provenance of the Special Collections and Archives department, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, USF St. Petersburg.

Scope and Contents

The contents of the Wilder's Park Collection occupy two document boxes (approximately one linear foot). Issues of *Wilder's Park News*, directories of park residents, and various newsletters and announcements constitute the primary materials in the collection. An appendix includes a copy of this finding aid and a photocopy of Lee Irby's "Taking Out the Trailer Trash" article from the Fall 2000 issue of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Inclusive dates of general materials in this collection are from 1956 to 1979, with bulk dates covering the same period. The language used on all materials in this collection is English.

Additional Sources of Information

Researchers may also want to consult:

Irby, Lee [Robert L.]. "Razing Gerontopolis: Green Benches, Trailer Trash, and Old People in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1910-1970." Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of South Florida, 1999.

_____. "Taking Out the Trailer Trash: The Battle Over Mobile Homes in St. Petersburg, Florida." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79 (Fall 2000): 181-200. (included as an appendix to this collection, see: Box 2, Folder 12)

Container Listing

BOX 1

Box 1, Folder 1	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1956
Box 1, Folder 2	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1957
Box 1, Folder 3	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1958
Box 1, Folder 4	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1959
Box 1, Folder 5	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1960
Box 1, Folder 6	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1961
Box 1, Folder 7	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1962
Box 1, Folder 8	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1963
Box 1, Folder 9	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1964
Box 1, Folder 10	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1965
Box 1, Folder 11	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1966
Box 1, Folder 12	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1967
Box 1, Folder 13	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1968

BOX 2

Box 2, Folder 1	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1969
Box 2, Folder 2	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1970
Box 2, Folder 3	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1971
Box 2, Folder 4	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1972
Box 2, Folder 5	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1973
Box 2, Folder 6	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1974
Box 2, Folder 7	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1975
Box 2, Folder 8	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1976
Box 2, Folder 9	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1977
Box 2, Folder 10	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1978
Box 2, Folder 11	<i>Wilder's News</i> issues for the year 1979
Box 2, Folder 12	Lee Irby article, "Taking Out the Trailer Trash" Finding Aid