



The Historical Society of Orange Park

October 2025 Newsletter

Finally, autumn has arrived and with it, some of the best weather of the year! With the advent of temperate weather, it's time to get out and enjoy all Orange Park has to offer.

The month kicks off with a special open house at the Clarke House featuring the musical talents of Eugene Nix, Steve Ferguson and Wanda Dillaberry, for an event we call Pickin' in the Park. October also features the Town of Orange Park's Annual Fall Festival. This event is a celebration of music, food, crafts and fun. In addition, the Historical Society will host Moonlight on Magnolia, featuring cemetery tours through Magnolia Cemetery that tell the story of our town through the lives of our former residents.

This month, we are proud to feature an article on long-time Orange Park optometrist and resident, Dr. Kyle Abshire. Dr. Abshire opened his Orange Park practice in October 1968, 57 years ago. His story is exemplary and we are happy to share it with you.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
October 12, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House/Music	Clarke House
October 18 & 19, 2025	10:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Fall Festival	Town Hall Park
October 25, 2025	4:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Moonlight on Magnolia	Magnolia Cemetery
November 9, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
November 11, 2025	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Veterans Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial
December 12 & 13, 2025	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday in the Park	Clarke House Park

Special Open House Sunday, October 12th

Join us for a special treat on Sunday, October 12th at the historic Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Ave. for an incredibly special open house. Three of Orange Park's longest-time residents will be "pickin" songs on the Clarke House porch.

Eugene Nix and Steve Ferguson both grew up here from the early 1960's, starting first grade at Orange Park Elementary and graduated 12 years later from Orange Park High School. Wanda Dillaberry, who rounds out the musical trio, moved to Orange Park in 1965 and graduated from OPHS.

In the 1960's, the Orange Park Lion's Club, then located on Stowe Ave., held teen dances every Saturday night to give the youth something to do in town. There were basically two rock and roll bands then and they would play on an alternating basis. Eugene and Steve had a band called the Gremlins (later The Six Teens). Wanda was the female lead vocalist for a band called the Daybreakers. In the early 1970s the Lion's Club ceased the dances and the band members graduated and moved on in their life journeys, all the while continuing their love of making music. Wanda was the sole music entertainer when the Town of Orange Park started the annual Fall Festival. She remained in that role until 2012.



More recently, the three have rejoined as a trio and meet up regularly to enjoy each other's company and reminisce on their great memories of growing up in Orange Park. They are making music together once again.

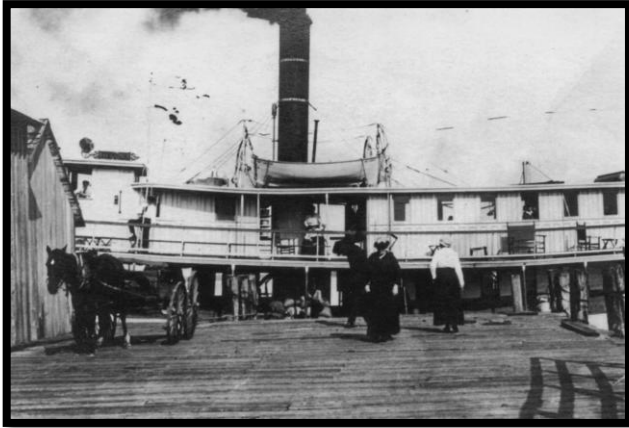
The Historical Society of Orange Park hopes you will join us from 2-4 PM for our monthly Open House and enjoy Pickin'-on-the-Porch. Who knows, you may hear a story or two about the joy of growing up in 1960s Orange Park!

Orange Park Memories

For 2025, the Society is highlighting Orange Park businesses each first-of-the-month, one from the town's beginning, the other still remembered by locals. This month we recognize the May Garner steamboat and Pureal Medical Center.

The steamboat, *May Garner*, began in the river resort era when tourists from the world over couldn't spend their money fast enough vacationing and investing in the area. After World War I, excursion trips were only for Sundays. Her regular route was between Jacksonville and Green Cove Springs. The other days of the week she carried freight and passengers. Built at Dames Point, Florida in 1895 of yellow pine, it was intended for use as a tug but was used in the U.S. Mail, Passenger and Freight service until about 1925.

Dr. Marcus Bergh was Orange Park's doctor. An ensign in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps, Bergh graduated from Johns Hopkins. He served in WW2 where his last duty station was NAS Jax. He became Medical Director of Moosehaven and later established his own practice and hospital, the Pureal Medical Center. It served the medical, surgical and obstetrical needs of the community for over forty years. Many local folks of a certain age were delivered by Dr. Bergh and many still have stories of his care. Please share your memories with us at info@ophistory.org.



May Garner

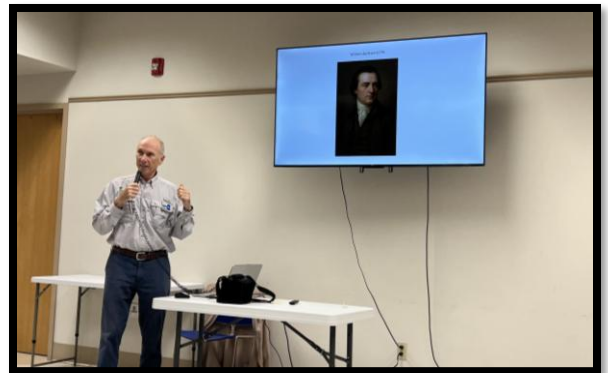


Dr. and Mrs. Marcus Bergh at Pural Medical Center

September Quarterly Meeting - Bartram Trail in Clay County

On Sept. 18th, the Society met at the library to learn about an exciting new project. Special guest speaker, Dean Campbell, Vice President of the Bartram Trail Society of Florida explained the process of bringing this history to life in Clay County.

Following the end of the French and Indian War, Britain gained control of Florida. In 1765, John Bartram, as Royal Botanist to King George III, and his son, William, explored a section of East Florida “for the benefit of the new colony.” John Bartram recorded soil types, and other natural history information for would-be landholders of plantations.



Dean Campbell, Bartram Trail Society of Florida



On the morning of February 6, 1766, Bartram’s party traveled upriver from Beauclerc Bluff for a short distance before crossing to Doctors Lake on the west shore. They explored the shoreline and visited the Springs. They continued their investigations in Clay County and then went on to other parts of Florida.

A trail system is being created to mark the stops made by the Bartrams. It will be part of the Bartram Trail of Florida, in what may someday be an interconnected system. Orange Park’s Nelson

Point is the first stop of the Clay County section. Efforts are being coordinated to generate maps and signs so that anyone can follow the Bartram path.

Stay tuned for more information on this project. Anyone with local knowledge that might benefit the trail is asked to contact Cindy Cheatwood (904.707.0822) so that the trail planners might have use of that information.

Orange Park Fall Festival

The Town of Orange Park will host the 43rd Annual Orange Park Fall Festival on Saturday, October 18 and Sunday, October 19, from 10 AM to 5 PM each day! The event features two full days of fun, food and music for the entire family. To learn more about the festival, please visit <https://opfallfestival.com/>. The Society will be hosting a booth again this year. Volunteers are needed to help us man the booth so please save the dates and help if you are able.



Moonlight on Magnolia

Please join us at Magnolia Cemetery on October 25 for Moonlight on Magnolia. This year's Moonlight on Magnolia will have a new twist. In addition to the usual time with guides and live characters telling their Orange Park stories, we will also have signs posted throughout the cemetery with short bios. The signs will share some of the same information that the guides share to improve the flow of tours with the intent of serving visitors in a timelier manner. The signs will be up throughout the next day as well for those unable to attend with the guides. Please help us pass the word and save the date, Oct 25th. The first guided tour will start at 4 pm and the last will start at 6 PM. There is no cover charge, but donations will be happily accepted.

We need guides and help at the front table. If you can spare an hour or two, please email us at info@ophistory.org so we can count you in!



Early Bird Special on Annual Memberships

As part of our membership drive for 2026, the Historical Society is offering a reduced rate for annual family memberships through the end of this year. Our Early Bird rates are as follows:

- Senior Family Membership \$15
- Family Membership \$30

We are also offering our Clarke House and Veterans Memorial wood Christmas ornaments, normally \$10 each, for the reduced rate of 2 for \$15. Take advantage of these prices while they last. The sale ends December 31.



Veterans Day Ceremony

Each year on Veterans Day, our community gathers at Magnolia Cemetery to honor the sacrifices of those who have served our great nation. Though our cemetery is small compared to the vast, solemn fields of Belleau, Ardennes, or Cambridge, it holds deep meaning. Here, on this sacred ground, our ceremony is simple but heartfelt. Without world leaders or fanfare, we pause together to remember those who remain in our hearts, and those whose names are etched in the pavers surrounding the memorial.

This year, we invite you to join us at 11:00 AM on November 11, for our annual Veterans Day ceremony. We hope you'll share this time of fellowship, gratitude, and remembrance with us. This year's ceremony will feature music by the Orange Park High School Choir and the First Coast Highlanders, a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron and remarks by Chief Randy Case, Orange Park Police, Carol Westerman, with the Sofia Fleming Chapter of the NSDAR and our featured speaker, Dr. Victor Maquera. As always, members of American Legion Post #250 will be on hand to assist with the ceremony. The ceremony will also feature the winning student essays from this year's essay contest.

Parking is at First Baptist Church one block west of the cemetery. Chairs are provided but are limited. You may want to bring your own.

Dr. Kyle Abshire – A Life of Service to the Community

In an age of constant change, it's always nice to have a constant, consistent presence on which you can depend. Dr. Kyle Abshire epitomizes that dependable presence.

Dr. Abshire grew up in West Virginia. His connection to Orange Park began as a young boy when his family purchased a vacation home on Plainfield Avenue near its intersection with Campbell Avenue. Starting at

the age of 13, Dr. Abshire spent his summers in Orange Park. At the time, Plainfield Avenue was paved only to Campbell Avenue, remaining a dirt road to the north. There was no Wells Road, only a narrow road leading to Well's dairy farm. At the north end of Plainfield Avenue were horse stables, part of the harness racing complex located where the Holiday Inn Express is today. Dr. Abshire spent his summers roaming the small town of Orange Park and spending time at the horse stables.



Dr. Kyle Abshire

After high school, Dr. Abshire attended college, graduating from Concord University before earning his Doctor of Optometry degree from Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Abshire entered the US Army as a commissioned officer, earning the rank of Captain. He served at Walter Reed Hospital and the Pentagon. Orange Park was never from his thoughts. He knew he wanted to return to the small town he knew as a boy.

After his discharge from the Army, Dr. Abshire arrived in Orange Park ready to work. With a loan from Walter Odum at the Bank of Orange Park, he established his optometry practice at 418 Kingsley Avenue. At the time, Kingsley Avenue was a tree-lined street, with one lane in each direction. Dr. Abshire was fond of the large oak trees that sheltered and shaded his new office.

Dr. Abshire truly cherished all his patients, which included many residents of the town including the beloved, Carrie Clarke. One patient Dr. Abshire cherished above all was a young woman named, Margaret Whitaker. A close relationship developed, which led to their marriage. Dr. Abshire and Margaret were married in 1974. They built a home at the site of his family's property on Plainfield Avenue, where they have lived happily ever since.

Growth came quickly to Dr. Abshire's practice. He remodeled his office several times to accommodate his growing practice. As the population of the town and the surrounding area grew, change was inevitable. Kingsley Avenue was widened, which took the oak trees he enjoyed so much. Soon, he was out of space. He opened a second office at 768 Blanding Boulevard to reduce the strain on his Kingsley office but the new office only increased his patient load. To accommodate his ever-growing number of patients, he built a new office at 859 Park Avenue.

In 1981, Dr. James Hoffman joined the practice. Dr. Hoffman proved to be a tremendous addition and the practice grew ever larger along with the town. Soon, more space was needed. Dr. Abshire built a larger office next door at 905 Park Avenue, where the practice resides today. Over the years, Dr. Abshire's practice grew to a staff of 43, including 7 doctors.

In addition to providing excellent care for his patients, Dr. Abshire served the community as well. As a member of the Lions Club, he provided eye exams so that those in need could receive free eyeglasses through that organization. When necessary, Dr. Abshire also provided free eyeglasses to those in need out of his own pocket. Dr. Abshire had an affinity for older patients. He provided eye exams for residents of

Moosehaven for 35 years. Dr. Abshire also served in the Naval Reserve for 14 years. In that capacity, he provided vision exams for naval recruits as well as pilots.

After 50 years of optometry practice, Dr. Abshire retired in 2018. He sold his business to Jim and Karen Hoffman who continue to provide excellent care to the community.



Outside of his practice, Dr. Abshire has always been very involved in the community. In addition to his time as a member of the Lions Club, he has been a member of the Orange Park Rotary Club for 49 years. He enjoys being a Rotarian as it allows him to give back to the community through grants to various non-profit organizations. Dr. Abshire served as a member of the Clay County Development Authority. In addition, he served as Chairman of the Board for the Clay County YMCA when they acquired their property on Moody Road. Along with Rev. Grady Williams, he helped to establish Providence Baptist Church in Fleming Island. After purchasing property on US 17, they merged with Hibernia Baptist Church, which is located on the site today. Dr. Abshire also assisted with church services for seniors at Allegro Senior Living in Fleming Island. He was also a member of the Florida Striders and keeps active by taking daily morning walks.

Dr. Abshire has always loved living in Orange Park. He misses the small-town Orange Park of his youth, a town with a slower pace of life, where everyone knew everyone else. However, despite the growth and resulting changes, there is nowhere else he would rather be. There are too many memories of a life well-lived and numerous contributions to the community.

On August 27, Dr. Kyle Abshire and his wife, Margaret, met with Sandra DiGiovanni and Cindy Cheatwood at the Clarke house to share their memories of Orange Park. Their conversation was recorded and the video posted to You Tube. You can access the video via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4VF4dv7ZMA>. It is easy to see Dr. and Mrs. Abshire's love for this town and their joy in sharing memories of the people and places that have made their time in Orange Park so special. They have been a blessing to this community.

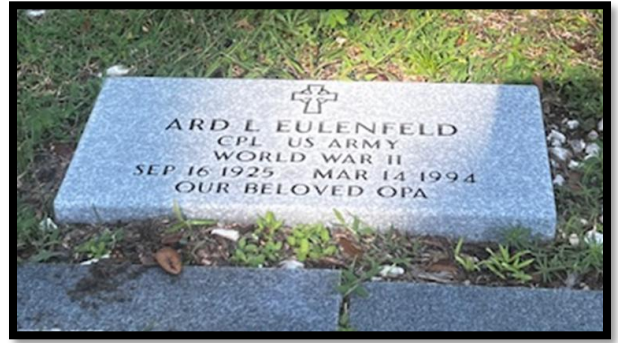
Veterans' Corner: Ard Lynwood Eulenfeld

Magnolia Cemetery is home to 265 veterans as of September 2025. In this column we will be highlighting a veteran through both his or her military service and contributions made in civilian life.

Most veterans will tell you that their service does not end at discharge. Veterans are known for their accomplishments after their military career is over. In each story we tell, it is important to cover both parts.

This month we are highlighting Ard Lynwood Eulenfeld.

Ard Eulenfeld was born in Lakeland, Florida in 1925. He was one of seven children of Ludwig and Cordie Eulenfeld. The family lived in the Lakeland area of Florida but relocated to Jacksonville about 1928. Unfortunately, Ard's father Ludwig died in 1929 when he was only 3 years old. Cordie remarried a few years later to Joe Wallings and the family bought the house at 211 Kingsley Avenue from the Estate of Minnie Shuttleworth.

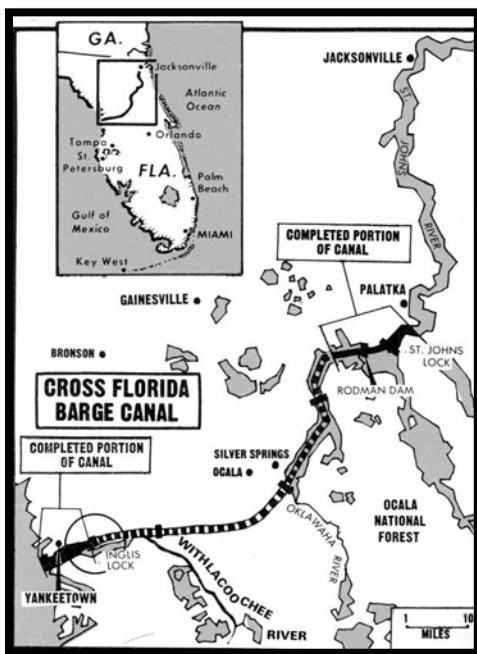


Tragedy struck again in 1937 when his mother, Cordie died. Ard was only 11 years old. He remained in the home with his older brother Benjamin until 1940 when the family relocated to Daytona Beach. Some of the family remained in Orange Park at 211 Kingsley Avenue.

Ard entered the US Army Air Corps in November 1943 at Camp Blanding working as a surveyor until his discharge in 1946. He then enrolled in college in Tallahassee.

The year 1947 saw many changes. Demand for continuing education by WWII veterans created a need for more educational opportunities. This resulted in the establishment of the Tallahassee Branch of the University of Florida in 1946. A year later, on May 15, 1947, the Governor signed an act of the Legislature returning Florida State College for Women to coeducational status naming it, The Florida State University.

Ard became a member of the Class of '51, majoring in Education. By 1950 he was doing an internship at a junior high school in Duval County and living with his younger sister Wanda Eulenfeld Brown at 1942 Reed Street (right behind the family home at 211 Kingsley Avenue).



By 1952, Ard had become a civil instructor at the Naval Air Technical Training Center located at NAS Jacksonville. Due to his education degree from FSU, his experience teaching at Lakeshore Junior High School, and his time spent in the US Air Corps, he became a qualified instructor.

In 1954 he married Edith Johnson, another FSU graduate. Edith worked for NAS Jacksonville as an artist responsible for creating, by hand in those days, media posted throughout the base. They spent time in Mississippi, Orange Park and North Georgia.

During his 33 years in military civilian service, Ard found himself in charge of the recreation phase of the North Florida Barge Canal in 1967. This canal program would set aside areas of 2,000 acres each that would be developed over years of canal use. Eventually the canal would have about 36 recreational sites. Unfortunately, the Cross-Florida Barge Canal was shelved in 1971 due to environmental concerns.

Ard spent his last years in a wheelchair and needed to relocate back to Florida to be close to family. He was living in St. Augustine where he published “Lebensraum (Living Space)”, a book about his life and about the circumstances and subsequent investigation of the shooting death of his friend, surveyor Louis McKee on Cumberland Island in 1980.

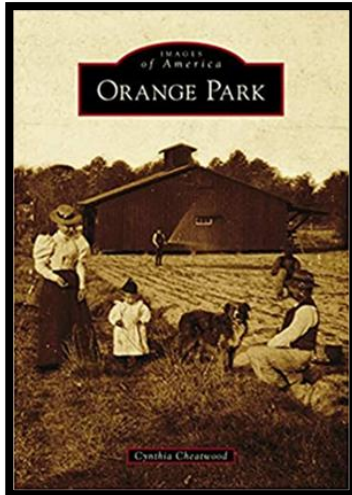
Clarke House Update: Carrie’s Bedroom Repainted

Over the first week of September, the master bedroom of Clarke House was given a fresh coat of blue paint. The curtains were washed and the windows cleaned as well. The room looks fantastic! Thanks to Sandra DiGiovanni for starting the process, for enlisting the Town’s Public Works crew to paint the walls and arranging the paint for the project. Thanks to Sandra and Barry DiGiovanni for helping with the walls and trim. Cindy Cheatwood assisted. Carrie would be proud! Be sure to come check it out at our special October 12th Open House.



Images of America: Orange Park

Images of America: Orange Park, authored by Historical Society President, Cynthia Cheatwood, is a wonderful way to learn about the history of Orange Park. This book shares the history of our town through archival photographs and stories collected from a variety of sources. The cost of the book is \$20 for members of our Society, \$25 for non-members and \$27 for online orders.



Clarke House Tours

The Clarke House will be open to the public for tours on Sunday afternoon, October 12 from 2 PM to 4 PM. The Clarke



House, built in 1912, served as the family home for William and Carrie Clarke for many years. It features hardwood floors, plastered walls and ceilings and large, spacious rooms with many windows for good ventilation. It was a comfortable home and the Clarke family shared many happy memories there. Stop by for a visit and make some memories of your own and feel free to share recollections that the house inspires.

Got pics?

The Society is looking for photographs to add to our resources. If you have long-time-ago images of people and/or places in Orange Park, please share them. In this increasingly visual world, there is a lot to learn from these glimpses of our past. You can share them through email at info@ophistory.org or through mail at P. O. Box 08, Orange Park, 32067. Originals will be returned after the Society makes a scan.



Look For Us Online

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, www.ophistory.org, our [Instagram](#) page or our [Facebook](#) page. Both sources provide updates on society news and activities.

Links to Local History

For more events and activities related to local history, please visit the following:

- [Clay County Historical Society](#)
- [Middleburg Museum](#)
- [Historical Society of Penny Farms](#)
- [Mandarin Museum and Historical Society](#)
- [Keystone Heights Heritage Commission](#)
- [Clay County Archives](#)

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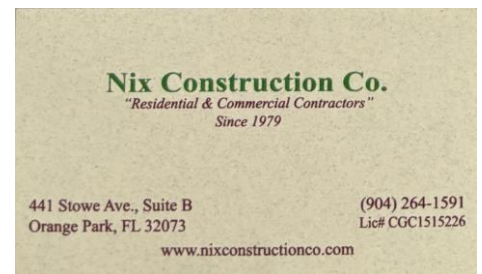
Jacksonville Memory Gardens,
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