



The Historical Society of Orange Park

October 2024 Newsletter

We welcome October and the fall season with open arms! The Historical Society’s activity calendar is full this fall. Volunteers are needed for all our upcoming activities. Please look over the Calendar of Events and find an activity where you can help while having a good time. Please email us at info@ophistory.org to let us know when you are available and what you would like to do. Our faithful volunteers enable us to offer these events.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
October 13, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
October 19 & 20, 2024	10:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Fall Festival	Town Hall Park
October 26, 2024	4:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Moonlight on Magnolia	Magnolia Cemetery
November 10, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
November 11, 2024	11:00 AM – 12 Noon	Veterans Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial
November 18, 2024	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
December 6 & 7, 2024	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday	Clarke House Park
December 14, 2024	11:45 AM – 1:00 PM	Wreaths Across America	Veterans Memorial

Town of Orange Park Fall Festival

The Town of Orange Park will host the 42nd Annual Orange Park Fall Festival on Saturday, October 19 and Sunday, October 20, from 10 AM to 5 PM each day! The event features two full days of fun for the entire family. The festival features music, food, fun, crafts, vendors, kid’s activities and live entertainment! Admission is free! Limited parking is available near the festival site and the Town has arranged for parking at Moosehaven with free shuttle service running throughout the day. To learn more about the festival, please visit <https://opfallfestival.com/>.



The Society will be hosting a booth at our usual location directly behind Town Hall, across from the gazebo to share our local history through various artifacts and displays as well as spread the word about upcoming events such as Moonlight on Magnolia and the Veterans Day Ceremony. Volunteers are needed to help us man the booth both days. If you can spare a few hours to help out, please email us at info@ophistory.org and let us know the times and dates you are available.

Moonlight on Magnolia

Moonlight on Magnolia, featuring historical guided walks through Magnolia Cemetery, will take place this year on October 26 from 4-7 PM. Visitors will be led through Magnolia Cemetery to visit “former residents” of Orange Park and hear their stories. Orange Park has had its share of interesting characters who have each made their unique contribution to creating the town we live in today. Their stories are the story of our town.



Volunteers are needed. There are acting parts available for those interested in presenting local characters to visitors. We also need folks to escort groups around as guides. There is a script to use as a guide and each guide can choose their outfit! We also need help with logistics- especially at the starting point where we need folks to man tables and help organize folks into equally populated groups. Please contact us at info@ophistory.org if you would like to participate.

Access to the cemetery will be different this year. The Town is replacing the culvert under the entrance road to the cemetery therefore, the entrance road will be closed and there will be no entry into the cemetery from Kingsley Avenue starting

September 2. Alternative access is being provided to the back of the cemetery via Azalea Avenue. Work has progressed and well and we are hopeful that the culvert work will be completed prior to this event and access restored to the cemetery via the entrance road.

Orange Park Memories

The Historical Society of Orange Park is sharing vintage news stories each month of 2024, clipped from *The Breeze* newspaper (1959 to 1971). This month we feature the Orange Park Garden Club and their “Plant-in Party”. This group has been making Orange Park prettier since 1948. The Historical Society appreciates the help they have given our organization over the years. Check out the old library in the background .



Bulbs, Buckets and Belles

Wednesday, December 3, passers-by at the Orange Park city buildings witnessed a flurry of chattering, digging, trowel-toting females who succeeded in planting one hundred and eighty spring bulbs in three hours. Come the fresh new season, ladies of the Orange Park Garden Club and all who take the time, will enjoy a spectacular array of colors in the area of the library. Perhaps this thought will compensate for aching muscles, soiled clothing and broken fingernails. Despite the hazards, all present enjoyed the “Plant-in Party,” under direction of Barbara Murdock, the garden club’s horticulture chairman. Female flower farmers present were Nita Womack, Wimmie Williams, Mary Williamson, Nan Ann Lee, Johnnie Waters, Georgia Ledbetter and Rosselle Hightower. Ruth Frye and Roxie Tynes held a private “plant-in” on the previous Saturday, which was the originally scheduled date, after their notice of the change was lost in the shuffle.

Veterans Day Ceremony

The Historical Society of Orange Park and the Town of Orange Park invite you to join us at 11 AM, Monday, November 11 for our annual Veterans Day Ceremony to be held at the Orange Park Veterans Memorial, which is located just inside the gates of the town's historic Magnolia Cemetery, 1040 Kingsley Avenue.

We welcome all to be a part of this moving, patriotic ceremony that pays tribute to those who bravely served our country.

The program for this year's recognition will include a presentation of the colors by the Orange Park High School NJROTC Color Guard, and musical performances by Kiley Taylor and the First Coast Highlanders. The program features inspiring words from Winette Sandlin, Vice Mayor of the Town of Orange Park, Judy Sweep with the Daughters of the American Revolution, and keynote speaker Kimberly Anding, USAF, Ret., Honor Flight Program Director. Also featured will be local students who will present the winning essays in the 2024 Veterans Day Essay Contest, participation by the American Legion Post #250 Riders and a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron from Haller Airfield.

Seating is limited so attendees are encouraged to bring their own chairs. There will be NO parking in the cemetery. Parking is available in the First Baptist Church lot one block west of the cemetery at 1140 Kingsley Avenue. Refreshments will be provided following the ceremony.



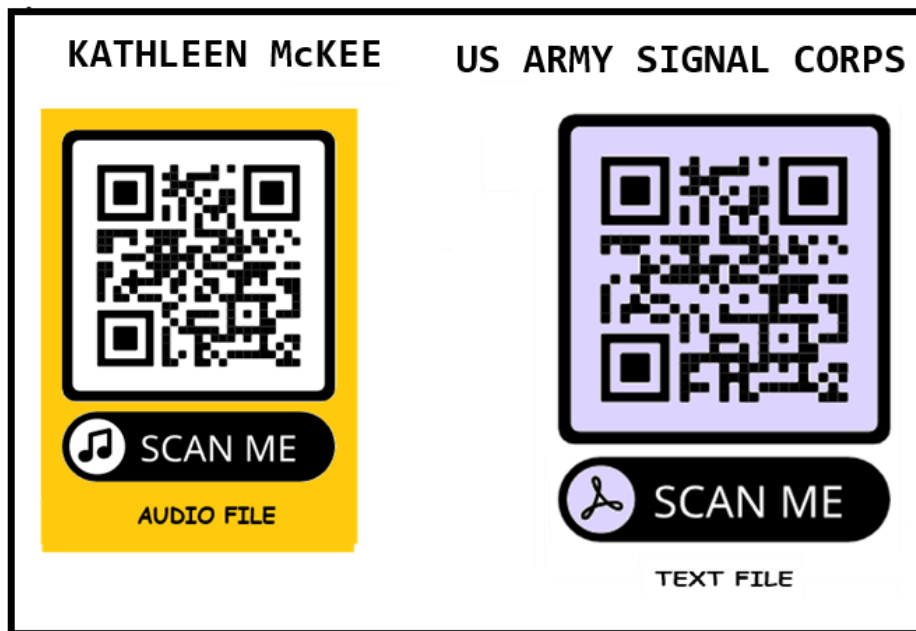
World War One Remembered

This year marks the 110th anniversary of the start of World War One. The Veterans Day holiday calls us to remember United States veterans, including the thirty who served in the Great War and now rest in Magnolia Cemetery. From November 8-15th, the Historical Society of Orange Park will have signs posted around Magnolia Cemetery similar to the sample below. With a cell phone, visitors can aim their camera at the QR codes on the signs to read or hear the story of the veteran in front of them. As we honor these veterans, we also get a unique view into the various duty stations, work assignments and battles they experienced.

The WW1 veterans in Magnolia came from a wide variety of places and backgrounds. The stories of most have been silent too long. Two were women. Two were from the same unit. Most were sent to France and were in the Army; many were privates. A scavenger hunt activity will be available for anyone who wants to accept the

challenge of visiting each site. We hope that older students might accept this challenge as a hands-on learning activity.

So, spread the word! Magnolia Cemetery is located at 1040 Kingsley Ave. in Orange Park where visitors are greeted with the town's beautiful Veterans Memorial upon entering.



The Opening of the Orange Park Mall and the Construction of Wells Road

On September 24, 2025, the Orange Park Mall will be 50 years old. The opening of the mall was a huge event for northeast Florida, especially Clay County. The mall's Marketing Director, Catharine Wells and Manager, Randy Bowman, want to mark the anniversary next year and recently met with members of the Historical Society of Orange Park to discuss ideas.

Joining Van Hogan and Cindy Cheatwood for this meeting was John Bowles who had the following reminiscence about his time as County Engineer, in charge of doing what seemingly could not be done.



In early 1974, Cousins Properties was interested in constructing a regional shopping mall and was trying to decide between locations in southern Duval County and northern Clay County. The southwest segment of I-295 had been recently completed between I-10 and I-95, improving access to the area. By the summer of 1974, Cousins Properties ultimately decided on a location just south of the Duval-Clay County line off Blanding

Boulevard. With an I-295 interchange on Blanding located just to the north, it was an ideal location. Steve Sunda was named Project Manager and construction of the mall started in fall of 1974.

Construction of a regional mall combined with the growth in northern Clay County dictated that changes to local infrastructure would be required. At the time Blanding Boulevard was a very busy, two-lane road. County officials had been imploring the Florida Department of Transportation to widen Blanding for some time but the FDOT had other priorities.

Finally, in January 1975 with the mall under construction, the FDOT offered Clay County an option to widen Blanding. The FDOT met with County officials and offered to widen Blanding from 2-lanes to 6 lanes from I-295 to a point just south of Kingsley Avenue if the county procured all the additional right-of-way needed for the widened highway and facilitate the necessary drainage.

In these years, northern Clay County was undergoing tremendous growth while southern Clay County remained relatively rural. County government was experiencing its own growing pains, which was reflected in administration and staffing. The FDOT expected that their conditions to widen Blanding might prove too much for the County to accept.

The County Board of Commissioners held an emergency meeting to consider the matter. Despite the county's limitations, they accepted the FDOT's offer. The county had 30 days to procure the necessary right-of-way so that the project could proceed on the FDOT's accelerated schedule. The task procuring the right-of-way was given to the new County Engineer/Public Works Director, John Bowles, and his staff of three people. They went to work and soon the project was underway.



Aerial Photo of the Wells Road Area - 1971

By this time, construction of the new mall was well underway. Even with accelerated construction, it was obvious the widening of Blanding Boulevard would not be completed before the opening of the new mall. Another means of access was needed to serve the new mall.

To provide the much-needed access, John Bowles was asked to build a road that stretched from Park Avenue, just south of I-295, to Blanding Boulevard, just north of the new mall. John and his Public Works staff had roughly 6 months before the mall opened to build the new road and, since it was an emergency decision, there was no budget money for the project.

The task began to brew in his mind. One night, at home and unable to sleep as the enormity of the task became apparent, he cut a paper grocery bag into a long sheet and started to

lay out his thoughts for a critical path schedule to find a way to get the road done in time.

The first task was to acquire the right-of-way for the new road. This task was made easier due to the fact most of the right-of-way needed was owned by the Wells' Dairy Farm. The owner, Mr. Wells, was 75 years old and ready to retire so negotiations were quickly completed.

Once land was secured, establishing the centerline of the road was the next step. There were two creeks, a wetlands area and a canal to accommodate. Each obstacle impacted the schedule. Without funds to hire contractors, John borrowed men from county road crews, including prisoners to do the work. They encountered rattlesnakes and were subjected to a very wet summer, which made earthwork and construction of the roadbed even more difficult.

Another challenge was added by the railroad. Railway companies build road crossings to ensure that the crossings meet their standards and their tracks are protected. John had to work with Seaboard Coastline Railroad, the forerunner of CSX Railroad, to get a new rail crossing completed in time to meet the opening date.

After the roadbed was completed, crushed limerock was needed to construct the base course. Limerock had to be transported from Chiefland, Florida. County trucks were pressed into service when enough local truckers could not be found. The storm drain system for the new road was also a challenge. To accommodate his budget constraints, John scavenged surplus concrete pipes from other road projects and subdivisions under construction to complete his work. The crossing of the large canal near the mall also proved to be a challenge. Somehow, they persevered.

With the base course completed, the question of asphalt had to be addressed. There simply was not enough money available to purchase the needed asphalt. A deal was struck between Cousins Properties and the county to share the cost of the asphalt. This agreement allowed the paving to be completed.

The night before the mall opening, there was still work to be done. John and his crew were up all night painting lines on the new road using striping equipment and cans of spray paint. They finished just in time for a line of cars to start down the brand-new Wells Road, bumper to bumper, for the exciting mall unveiling.

John went on to hold other jobs in county government but, for us in Orange Park, we remember him more as the Town Manager of the Town of Orange Park, a job he held for 22 years.



Present-Day Wells Road

Plans are underway for a grand celebration of the Orange Park Mall's 50th anniversary. If you have photographs you can share or stories we can record, please share them either at ophistory.org or by mail to PO Box 08, Orange Park, FL 32067.

In Memory of Barney Clark

As most of you are aware, our friend, Barney Clark, passed away on the afternoon of September 22. Barney was a kind soul that took life as it came. He had a wry sense of humor and was generous to a fault. Barney always graciously prepared and served a ham or turkey for the Society's Christmas dinner and always made time for conversation or a story. One of our favorite memories of Barney is his portrayal of Jessie Carnes at our annual Moonlight on Magnolia event. Mr. Carnes was in the fishing business and had a processing facility on Doctors Lake. As Barney spoke, you could easily envision the work required to harvest and prepare the fish for market. Barney would always end his presentation with his signature line, "Eat more catfish!". May we all enjoy some catfish and grits in memory of Barney.

In lieu of a funeral service, the family will host a reception in memory of Barney at their home on Saturday, October 19 from 11:30 AM to 3:00 PM. Please stop by to share your memories, stories and friendship with the family.



Barney was a long-time resident of Orange Park and experienced a lot of its history. Several years ago, Barney shared memories of his youth in Orange Park. We hope you enjoy the following story in his words.

Orange Park Memories

By Barney Clark

We moved to Jacksonville in January 1946, right after the war was over. Daddy went back to work for the construction company that he worked with before the war, Hall Construction. They had a shop in Orange Park at the northwest corner of Plainfield and Kingsley Avenues where Walgreens is now located. The property ran east to the city lift station and west to the creek. It was a big piece of ground. In June 1948, we moved to Orange Park into a house on Great Oaks Circle, which was right across US 17 from Moosehaven. We lived there until 1950, when Mom and Dad bought a house on Collins Road.

I was going to Robert E Lee High School and a friend of mine, Bob Cotney, lived in Orange Park. His dad owned Cotney Tire Company at Park and King Streets in Jacksonville. We both rode into town with him until we graduated in 1950.

I played baseball on Moosehaven's ball field, located at the corner of US 17 and McIntosh Avenue. One day Jack Robbins, Herman Card, Leo Thomas, myself and some other boys were playing ball when an elderly couple came walking across the field through the infield. We stopped playing to let them pass. They went over and sat down on some benches along the McIntosh side. We resumed playing ball. In a few minutes another man came along with a cane. He limped across the infield over to the couple sitting on the bench. He then hit the man sitting on

the bench in the head with his cane, knocking him to the ground. He was bleeding from the head. One of the boys in the outfield ran to Moosehaven to get help. Help arrived pretty quick. We didn't know what was going on but we later found out that the man that was hit was out with the second man's girlfriend.

My father bought me a Cushman motor scooter from NAS supply surplus. My friends and I rode it all over Clay County. We were on that thing all the time going somewhere. Once in a while Jack, who was my best friend, and another boy would ride the scooter north on Plainfield to where there was a watermelon field on the west side of the road. I would slow down, the boy on the back would slide off and run into the field, grab a watermelon then come back up to the road. I would slow down so he could jump back on. We would go to Wade (Wadesborough) Springs and put the watermelon in the water until it cooled down. We would then cut it open and eat as much as we could hold. We took the rind and threw it in the ditch so no one would know it was there then we would ride off.



I graduated in June 1950 and spent that summer with my grandparents at Dunn's Creek, 9 miles south of Palatka. In September, I went to work at Hall Construction. My main job was picking up parts in Jacksonville and carrying them to jobs all over the state. The crew at the shop was Mutt Horton, Sam Spencer, B.C. Clark, my dad, and me.

Orange Park was a quiet, friendly town. A few businesses were located on Highway 17. Coming north on 17 at Kingsley, on the east side you had Skippers Bar, and on the corner was Drag Pace's filling station then Doc Snyder's drugstore, Sparky Jones' radio shop, Whitfield Grocery and the dog track. On the west side of 17 at Kingsley was some old Moosehaven buildings then across the street was Quigley Motors, Huntley Brothers' grocery store, Townsend's Pharmacy and its snack bar. The mother of my best friend, Jack, mother worked behind the counter. She made the best pies in the country. I would go in and get a piece of pie and an ammonia Coke. It sure was good. Next was Jean Jowers dress

shop, a 5 and 10 Cent Store then Great Oaks Circle, followed by Thrifty Service Station, where gas was 29.9 cents per gallon. 5 gallons was a dollar and a half. To the north there was a used car lot and Empire Trailer Park. That was about the extent of the booming metropolis of Orange Park.

One day Mutt Horton asked me if I had ever been a Boy Scout. I told him I had been a scout in Palatka for a couple of years during the war. He said they needed a temporary Scoutmaster for a troop. I didn't know if they were starting a new troop or if a previous scoutmaster had left but I told him I would try. So I became a temporary Scoutmaster. Jack Robbins was Senior Patrol Leader and we made like we knew what we were doing. The kids were pretty good, sometimes they acted like they were like they were Dead End Kids but we got along pretty good. We went camping on Peter's Creek, right across from the Girl Scout camp. The boys wanted to cut

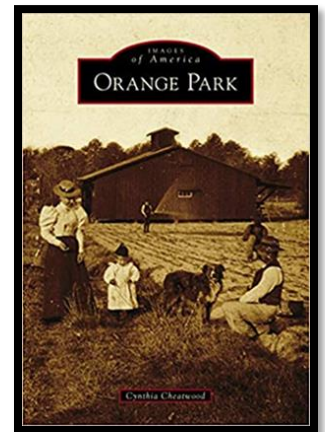
some trees down to make a raft to go over and see the girls but that didn't happen. We later went to a Camporee at the Boy Scout camp and they found somebody that was a real Scoutmaster who took my place.

I was drafted in 1952. When I left Hall Construction, Marvin Davis took my job. He did the runs that I used to do. One day he was going over to Durbin, which is across the Shands Bridge. He got about through the middle of the bridge where it curved and a tie rod end fell off, sending Marvin and the dump truck into the river. Luckily, Marvin wasn't hurt but if it hadn't been for Uncle Sam that would have been me in the drink.

It was a good life for a kid in Orange Park and I enjoyed it.

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. 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 13 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.

Look For Us on Online

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, www.ophistory.org, 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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