



The Historical Society of Orange Park

March 2025 Newsletter

The month of March brings the return of spring as flowers bloom, green leaves sprout and warm temperatures become the rule and not the exception. March also brings Carrie Clarke Day; the day we get to celebrate Carrie Clarke and her contributions to our community. For those that might not remember, the Clarke House was a tipping point in the creation of our historical society. The Town of Orange Park purchased the Clarke property in the early 1990's with plans to develop the property into a park. One aspect of those plans was the demolition of the Clarke family home. The prospect of losing this beautiful house that was so representative of Orange Park's past galvanized a group of citizens to band together and petition the Town to spare Mrs. Clarke's home. The success of the group's efforts led them to form our historical society to preserve other aspects of our town's history. We are grateful for their efforts to preserve our heritage and provide a foundation for those that have followed. The Clarke House was built with a family in mind and many memories were created there. Please join us as we celebrate Mrs. Clarke on March 8 and make memories with your family at the Clarke House.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
March 8, 2025	11:00 AM – 4:00 PM	Carrie Clarke Day	Clarke House Park
March 9, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
March 18, 2025	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
April 13, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Carrie Clarke Day is March 8th!

All hands on deck! March 8th is Carrie Clarke Day, our annual opportunity to let the community know just how special Mrs. Clarke was. We are asking for cookie donations for prizes to award "winners" following our old-fashioned games. These should be in small baggies as individual awards. One regular sized cookie per bag is fine, or two if they are small. It is possible some kids may play several games, so we don't want to make the baggies too full, wink, wink. Old fashioned oatmeal or chocolate chip cookies are always popular, but sugar cookies are good too. Please indicate if peanuts have been used in the recipe so that those with allergies might be aware. (A "p" on the baggie is sufficient.)



Activities being planned by the Society include historical house tours, tool demonstrations in the shed, old fashioned games, art demonstrations by the Art Guild, selfies with historic hats, the annual *Pea*-can vs *Puh*-can

name contest and more. The Lions Club will be grilling for the first time in several years! The Garden Club of Orange Park will decorate the Clarke House with a not-to-be-missed collection of fresh floral arrangements.

Help is needed leading tours, sharing Society information, and helping with the activities above. It takes a team! The event will be open to the public from 11AM-4 PM. Help setting up and clearing away would also be helpful.



Quarterly Member Meeting


Please join us at 5:30 PM, Tuesday, March 18 at the Orange Park Library for our next Quarterly Member Meeting. Bob Scallan will present "Heroes, Legends, Histories, and Mysteries". Bob will delve into the lesser-known aspects of Clay County's history, presenting intriguing narratives that highlight obscure events and figures. Bob will explore a range of topics, including the enigmatic Humanzee, unsolved sheriff murders, the historical significance of covered bridges, the contributions of Washington Gano Benedict, the founder of Orange Park, and the mysteries surrounding unmarked graves in Magnolia Cemetery. His examination will reveal compelling stories from the community that may be unfamiliar to many residents, inviting them to discover the rich and hidden history of their surroundings. We hope you will join us!

ADULT
Recommended for ages 18y & older

HEROES, LEGENDS HISTORIES AND MYSTERIES





at the Orange Park Library

March 18 at 5:30 p.m.



Join the Historical Society of Orange Park in welcoming speaker Bob Scallan as we have a little fun with Clay County's histories and mysteries.

To learn more about the Historical Society of Orange Park, please visit www.ophistory.org

Library.ClayCountyGov.com    904-278-3614 

Black History Walks - Our First Experiences

The Society conducted historical walks through Magnolia Cemetery on February 15th and 22nd to highlight the key Black families in Orange Park's history. We invited family members and acquaintances to tell these stories in their own words and supplemented with researched talking points along the way.

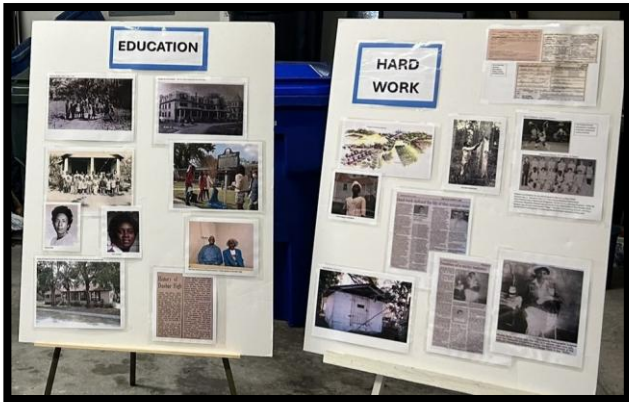
Our first Saturday offering was greeted with rain but still folks stayed for the whole tour. We greatly appreciate the help from Sandra DiGiovanni and Bob Scallan who, along with Cindy Cheatwood, led tour groups to various stops throughout the cemetery.

Speakers, including Desiree Allen, Betty Demmons, Ed Keyes, Dr. Cheryl Gonzalez, and Shauntai Arrington, talked about the Filmore, Pollard, Keyes/Burroughs/McDowers/Hill families as well as Joseph Green. Guides explained the stories of Lawrence Hicks, Alice Gittens and World War One veterans, Early Glover, Milton Weston and Rollin Smith. These represent a substantial number of folks over the generations, all of whom contributed to the community.

A *Black History of Orange Park* pop-up museum was displayed for the event. This included large panels with pictures of some of the folks remembered on the walks as well as background information about the Black community in Orange Park, the Orange Park Normal School, turpentine and more. Students from the National Jr. Honor Society of Orange Park Junior High were on hand both Saturdays to record the presentations. They are compiling their footage into a presentable video that can be shared for years! We appreciate the help of their sponsor, Paige Jacob, who recruited the students on our behalf and assisted them throughout, even now assisting with the process of video editing.

Thanks go out to Barry DiGiovanni, Davarye Coleman, Richard Cheatwood and Van Hogan for logistical support and front table management. Visitors made donations, bought tee shirts and books and we even gained a few new members! We hope to repeat the event next year.





Orange Park Memories

The Society is highlighting Orange Park businesses each first-of-the-month throughout 2025, one from the town's early days and one which will be recognizable to many locals. This month we remind folks of the Fisk Tire Company and Horton's Garage.

Fisk Tires, shown here in the business district on Kingsley Ave., offered full automotive services in the 1940's as the town became a go-between for Jacksonville and Green Cove Springs. Many commuter businesses were established during the 1940s and '50s including motels, tea rooms/diners and service stations like this one.

Cars first arrived in Orange Park in 1913, and a new industry began. Three generations of JC Horton's family (pictured) worked in the Horton Garage, from 1957 to 2016. Locals knew they could get good work done with honesty. Horton's Garage was a fixture in Orange Park for many years however, as the town grew, the Horton's property increased in value until it became prudent to sell. The land was sold to Orange Park Medical Center to provide room for the expansion of their operations.



Fisk Tire Company



Horton's Garage

Orange Park Historic Driving Tour



Looking for somewhere to explore or something to do in Clay County? Visit the Explore Clay website, [Explore Clay County - Small Towns, Big Passions](#), for plenty of suggestions.

One of the activities is a tour of historic buildings in Orange Park. This driving tour takes you to 23 historical structures that hold positions of prominence in Orange Park's history and continue to serve today. ***Please remember most locations are private residences and should be viewed from the street.***

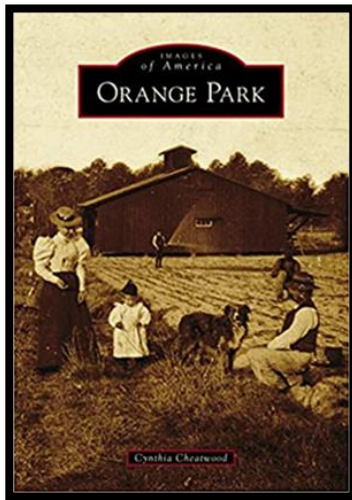
To access the tour visit, download the Explore Clay mobile app from the Explore Clay website or by clicking: [Clay County - Mobile App](#). Once you have the app downloaded, search for the tour then dive into the rich history of Orange Park.

Look For Us 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.

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, March 9 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.



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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