



The Historical Society of Orange Park

December 2024 Newsletter

As we come to the end of 2024, we hope that it has been a good year for each of you. It has certainly been an interesting year, but a very good year for the Historical Society. We accomplished a great deal this year through the leadership of our officers and the many contributions of our members. We extend our thanks to each of you for your support.

Of particular interest this month is the Town of Orange Park's annual Hometown Holiday event, the Wreaths Across America event and our Society's Christmas Gathering. You can find information on each of these activities in this newsletter.

As Christmas approaches, let us note that it was the Ghost of Christmas Past that reminded Ebenezer Scrooge of the friends and loved ones that brought so much joy to his life. May the Ghost of Christmas Past visit each one of us this season to remind us of the good times we have shared with others and encourage us to do so again this year. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and may God bless us everyone!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
December 6 & 7, 2024	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday	Clarke House Park
December 8, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
December 14, 2024	11:45 AM – 1:00 PM	Wreaths Across America	Veterans Memorial
December 14, 2024	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	HSOP Christmas Gathering	Clarke House
January 12, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
February 9, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Hometown Holiday

Join us for the 12th annual Hometown Holiday at Clarke House Park on Friday, December 6 and Saturday, December 7. The event will run from 5 PM to 9 PM each evening. This is always a great family event with something for everyone and every age.

The Clarke House will be decorated for the holidays and open to visitors. Members of the Society will be on hand to answer questions and provide information about the Clarke family and our town's history.





Other activities will include live musical entertainment, food vendors, pictures with Santa, a Christmas village where you can shop for unique gifts, holiday movies on a large, outdoor screen and trail rides through the trees on a trail decorated with holiday lights.

This old-fashioned holiday celebration is a wonderful way for your family to start the Christmas season!

Parking is available across the street from Clarke House Park at the First Baptist Church of Orange Park. Orange Park Police Officers will be on-site to help everyone safely cross Kingsley Ave. Limited handicap parking is available within the park.

We will again be collecting non-perishable food items to donate to those in need this holiday season. Food items will be collected at the Clarke House. All donations will be delivered to the Clothes Closet for distribution in the Orange Park area.

Holiday Gathering

On the evening of December 14th at 6 PM, there will be a Christmas Gathering and General Meeting of the Historical Society at the Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Avenue in Clarke House Park. This meeting is open to members and friends of the Society as well as those interested in joining the Society. We look forward to seeing everyone. Come join us for music, news and fellowship as we celebrate the season and share good times. We will be collecting non-perishable food items to donate to those in need this holiday season. All donations will be delivered to the Clothes Closet for distribution in the Orange Park area. *Please bring a dessert to share with others if you are able.*



Wreaths Across America



The Magnolia Cemetery Board, Town of Orange Park and Moosehaven are proud to again sponsor the Wreaths Across America at Magnolia and Moosehaven Cemeteries for 2024.

A ceremony at the Veteran's Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery will begin at 11:45 AM on December 14, 2024. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Mayor Randy Anderson will place the first wreath honoring a veteran selected by the Historical Society of Orange Park. After the first wreath is placed, volunteers will place an

additional 224 wreaths in Magnolia Cemetery and 50 wreaths honoring the veterans in Moosehaven Cemetery.

Again, this year volunteers are from the following groups:

Boy Scout Troop 25

Cub Scout Pack 25

Girl Scout Troop 31020

Black Creek Young Marines

American Legion 250 Riders

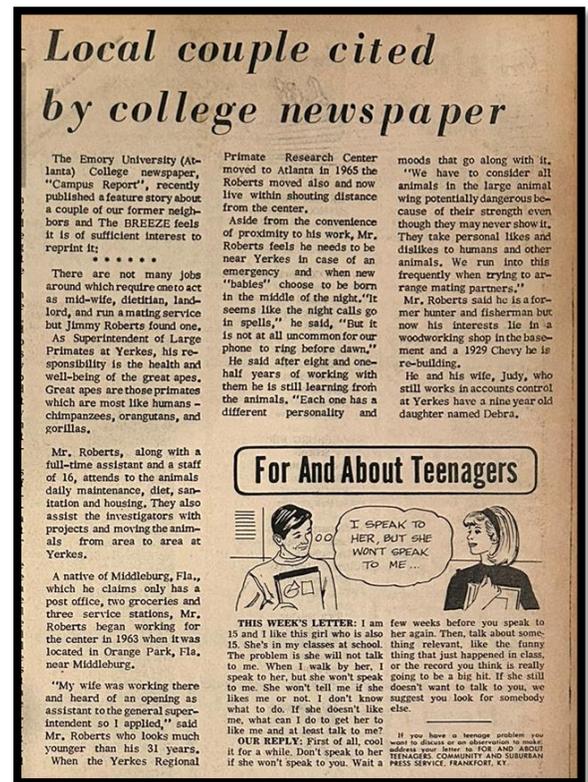
Orange Park Rotary Club- Sunrise

We are proud to be a part of Wreaths Across America. In 2023, over 3 million wreaths were placed at over 4000 locations nationwide and abroad.

If you would like to participate by placing wreaths, please feel free to volunteer on our website:
www.wreathsarossaamerica.org/FL1000

Orange Park Memories

In this last first-of-the-month posting of Breeze newspaper snips, we wanted to remind folks that Orange Park was once the home of the most advanced Primate Research Center in the world. After Emory bought the operation and moved it to Atlanta, the work continued, and still does to this day. This article ran Dec. 30, 1971. The Society wants to thank the Hull family for their generous gift of original newspapers. We are going to share a few more this month, so check back everyone.



Keystone Heights Heritage Commission

The Keystone Heights Heritage Commission is planning a big celebration in 2025. One November 2nd, the Historical Society of Orange Park and other local historical groups were invited to meet with this group to discuss how we might collaborate to make it a big event. Representatives from Middleburg, Alachua County, Melrose and Waldo were on hand to share ideas.

Already scheduled are a tour of homes to be held from 11:30-3:30 on December 21st and a gala scheduled for 12/28. The Heritage Commission is partnering with the Womans Club of Keystone Heights for this, so more information is available at their website: [Upcoming Events | Womans Club of KH](#). Six historic homes will be featured, all decked out for the holidays. Cindy Cheatwood is going and would love some Orange Parkers to join her.



Veterans Day Ceremony

On Monday, November 11, the Historical Society of Orange Park, in cooperation with the Town of Orange Park, hosted the annual Veterans Day Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery. The ceremony was well-attended on a beautiful, warm day.

The ceremony was opened in prayer by Chaplain Kenny Greenwood of American Legion Post #250 followed by the presentation of the colors by the Orange Park High School NJROTC Color and the National Anthem by Ms. Kiley Taylor. We were also treated to a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron of Haller Field.

We were fortunate to have wonderful speakers at this year's event: Winnette Sandlin, Vice Mayor of Orange Park, Judy Sweep, Regent of the Sophia Fleming Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and Kimberly Anding, an Air Force veteran and a Director for First Coast Honor Flight. Each speaker shared their thoughts on the importance of Veterans Day and service to our country. Vice Mayor Sandlin and Ms. Anding joined together to place a wreath at the memorial in honor of our veterans.

Another highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of awards for the annual Essay Contest and the reading of the winning essays. The winners of the essay contest were as follows:



Kimberly Anding

Elementary Division

Topic: Why We Celebrate Veterans Day

Winner

Macey Mealor, Paterson Elementary, Teacher, Lina Myers

Honorable Mention

Leevi Killebrew- Orange Park Elementary-Teacher: Wendi Stephens

Olivia Sirdevan - Paterson Elementary, Teacher: Lina Myers

Junior High Division

Topic: A Veteran Who Inspires Me

Winner

Amira Hawks, Green Cove Springs, Jr., Teacher: Leah Fogle

Honorable Mention

Callie Boggs, Green Cove Springs Junior High, Teacher: Leah Fogle

Kamila Rodriquez Velasquez, Lake Asbury Junior High, Teacher: Jeannet Burley

Senior High Division

Topic: How veterans demonstrate "Duty, Honor, Country" throughout their lives

Winner

Dylan Collins, Clay High School, Teacher: Chadwick Rix

Honorable Mention

Hannah G. Owen, Ridgeview High School



Macey Mealor



Amira Hawks



Dylan Collins

Each student listed above received a certificate noting their accomplishment and a cash prize or gift card. Students with the winning essays also received a plaque. Congratulations to these students for their outstanding essays. We offer our sincere appreciation for all students that put forth the time and effort to research and prepare an essay for this contest. The winning essays have been posted to our website.

We were privileged to have with us Mr. Billie Joe Cate, a Korean War veteran, who read a poem he composed entitled, "Honoring Our Veterans on Veterans Day." Chaplain Kenny Greenwood closed the ceremony in prayer followed by the playing of Taps by Cindy Anderson.

We are grateful for the musical contributions of Ms. Kiley Taylor and the First Coast Highlanders. We also appreciate the steadfast contributions of American Legion Post #250 Riders. Our special thanks to the Garden Club of Orange Park, First Baptist Church of Orange Park, Sophia Fleming Chapter of the NSDAR, Orange Park Woman's Club, Scout Pack 653, the Dreamland Squadron of Haller Field, the Town of Orange Park for their support and helping us to make this ceremony possible. We also offer our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Bob Scallan for his efforts in organizing this year's ceremony.



Mr. Billie Joe Cate



Members of the Orange Park Women's Club were on hand to serve refreshments after the ceremony.

Quarterly Member Meeting and Annual Meeting:

The Society conducted a Quarterly Member Meeting on Monday, November 18 at the Orange Park Library. This meeting also served as our Annual Corporate Meeting. The election of officers was conducted with the existing officers being reelected to their posts to serve in 2025. President Cindy Cheatwood also shared a list of the Society's accomplishments for this year.

The Annual Meeting was followed by a presentation entitled: **The Winter that Took the Orange Out of Orange Park.** Van Hogan shared



the story how two devastsating freezes in the winter of 1894-1895 obliterated the citrus crop and citrus trees in Florida. The loss of the citrus trees caused severe economic hardship and negatively affected the growth of Florida, particularly in Orange Park which went from a properous community to a struggling commuinity overnight.

Long-Awaited Hibernia Marker Dedicated

It was a beautiful day for a marker dedication on November 19. The site of the marker is seeped in Clay County history. The Fleming family settled there in 1796 and the second generation, Lewis Felming built his Big House there in 1858. It later became a winter resort for almost a century. The bathhouse build in 1885 is still working and is one of the oldest in Florida. Bricks, beams, doors, heart pine floors and 400 window panes were saved from the Big House are were used in the construction of the current home on the Old Church Road property. The new owners promise to keep the history alive.

The marker was the product of sheer determination on the part of Leighton Tesche who invited the Society along for the historical ride. The marker was made possible by the National Society of Colonial Dames, Hannah Dustin Chapter with the marker paperwork conducted by their historical marker chiarman, Nancy Stokes. Following the dedication, guests were treated to refreshments and were free to walk the grounds and tour the home. It was a special day for Clay County history.



Members Take Advantage of Rare *Opportuni-TEA*



With new buyers for Miller-Halligan House on Stiles Avenue ready to close on their new home, realtor Gavin Toth issued an invitation to our Society to hold a social meeting in the historic home. Over twenty members, long-time and brand new, convened on November 30th for an old-fashioned tea party inside the home. There was much excitement as we toured the home, shared memories and enjoyed fellowship.

The Miller-Halligan home was built in 1895 as a carriage house of the Riverside estate of Courtland Buckman, brother of Henry Holland Buckman for which our bridge is named. In

1951, widow Vernice Miller (right) was able to bring the house to Orange Park with the help of her brother-in-law, Architect Ivan Huron Smith, a founding partner in the Reynolds Smith and Hills architectural firm of Jacksonville. Smith planned and facilitated the division of the house into three parts and sent it to Orange Park via the St. Johns River.



The 1895 carriage house was incorporated into a new home in 1951.



Vernice Miller

Miller lived in the home for 35 years, her son, Thomas grew up there and after her death, sold it to William Halligan Jr. and his wife, Essie, (right) and it was a busy thriving home for over thirty more years until Essie, then a widow, died earlier this year. We are told the new owners are interested in preserving the home's history. We wish them luck and await new family memories at 154 Stiles Ave.

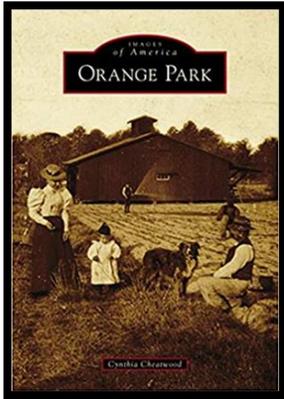


Essie and Bill Halligan



HSOP members gather to tour the Miller-Halligan home and enjoy refreshments.

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, December 8 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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