



The Historical Society of Orange Park

September 2026 Newsletter

Hello September! As summer begins to give way to fall, the Historical Society of Orange Park has a full schedule of community events and activities to share. In this issue, you'll find information about upcoming Clarke House open houses, information on a video project for Clay County students, the premiere of the PBS Florida Road Trip featuring Clay County, opportunities to support Moonlight on Magnolia, updates on the Clarke Cottage renovation, and several ways to celebrate, remember, and connect with Orange Park's rich past.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
September 4, 2026	11:00 AM – 2:00 PM	Celebrate the 904	Orange Park Mall
September 13, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
September 22, 2026	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Community Night	Firehouse Subs
October 11, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
October 19, 2026	6:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
October 24, 2026	4:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Moonlight on Magnolia	Magnolia Cemetery
November 8, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
November 11, 2026	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Veterans Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial

Clay County Goes Hollywood!, by Cindy Cheatwood

On August 24th, nine leaders of Clay County's historical groups participated in a video roundtable to help Clay County students decide "What had the greatest impact on Clay County History?". Students in 8th grade across the county are given a set of documents related to the varied communities in Clay. They are asked to choose between military influences, river trade and transportation, and the land and agriculture to make a choice as to what has most impacted on Clay County history.

Local historical representatives John Bowles (Green Cove Springs), Bree McGhee (Fleming Island/Hibernia), Vishi Garig (oldest history, British and Spanish FL), Dierdre Murphy (Keystone Heights), Ken Francis (African American Historical Society of Clay County), Ray Scott (Military Museum of N FL), Greg Parsons (Camp Blanding), Ruth Paine (Middleburg), Cathie Parrott (Penney Farms, remotely), and Orange Park was represented by Cynthia Cheatwood, who also acted as moderator.

Karrie Massee of Club Continental graciously permitted use of the Club's main dining area for the shoot. State representative Sam Garrison opened the video with a statement of support, and County Clerk Tara Green closed it with affirmations. Historical artifacts were shared for use in the video. The historians had a great time, and everyone learned just a little more about the varied parts of the county.

Funding for this professionally produced video was provided through a state grant procured by Clay County's Clerk of Court's, Mary Justino, who then hired a very talented team of videographers. Weeks of planning were done leading up to the taping, and all representatives did a wonderful job of sharing the important elements of Clay history in the video. Filming took 2½ hours. Now the production team will analyze, cut, and splice until a final product emerges in a couple of months. The final version will be made available for us to share with our members. The students will use the video in conjunction with printed documents given to them; they will be able to quote from the video, which will be shown in segments rather than as a whole.



Florida Road Trip- Clay County Airs Soon!

The Clay County episode of Florida Road Trip will premiere on WUCF on **Thursday, September 24 at 8:00 PM**. It will also be broadcast across Florida on other local PBS stations, including WJCT, at various times so please check local listings. This episode, and other episodes of Florida Road Trip, can also be viewed

online via YouTube. Please visit the Florida Road Trip website, <https://www.floridaroadtrip.org/>, for more information or https://www.youtube.com/@Florida_RoadTrip/featured, to view the program online. The Clay County episode promises to:

- Highlight local history and cultural heritage unique to Clay County.
- Showcase landmarks, towns, and natural features that define the area.
- Feature interviews with residents and local experts.
- Connect the county's story to broader themes in Florida's history and identity.

A portion of the Orange Park segment was filmed February 27th, inside Clarke House, sharing the story of the Clarke family and Clarke House. Check it out!

Get the SCOOP...

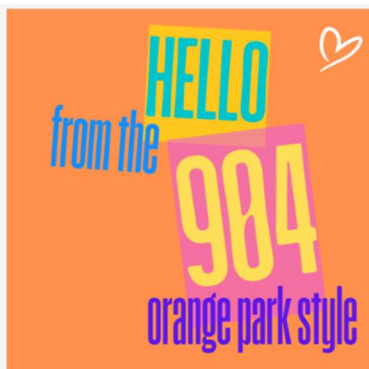
The Historical Society will offer Monday presentations at 9:00 AM, each Monday morning from September 21 through November 16, for the Shepherd's Center of Orange Park (SCOOP). The presentations will be conducted at the Orange Park Methodist Church Family Life Center, 2042 Reed St., Orange Park, FL 32073. Registration is required. Please visit the Shepherd's Center of Orange Park's website at <https://www.tscoop.org/> for more information. To register for the Historical Society's presentations, and other Monday classes, visit <https://www.tscoop.org/monday-classes/>.



The topics below will be explored along with backstories that will illuminate and educate:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Presenter</u>
September 21	<i>The Charming Story of Orange Park's Creation</i>	Cynthia Cheatwood
September 28	<i>Heroes, Legends, Histories & Mysteries</i>	Bob Scallan
October 5	<i>Orange Park Normal & Industrial School</i>	Van Hogan
October 19	<i>Celebrating the Town Fathers (and Mothers)?</i>	Sandra DiGiovanni
October 26	<i>In the Line of Duty: Clay Counties Fallen Sheriffs</i>	Bob Scallan
November 2	<i>Via Who? What You'll Love to Know about the Tisdelles</i>	Sandra DiGiovanni
November 9	<i>Orange Park's Monkey Farm</i>	Cynthia Cheatwood
November 16	<i>The Winter That Took the Orange Out of Orange Park</i>	Van Hogan

Celebrate the 904!



Join the Historical Society at Orange Park Mall on Friday, September 4, 2026, from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM to celebrate the 904!

Join us for a colorful community celebration spotlighting the amazing nonprofits, organizations and local connections that make the 904 such a special place to call home. Pick up your 904 Passport at the DJ station in Center Court and explore interactive stops throughout the mall featuring community partners, giveaways, music, and more. No registration is

required. Simply stop by, pick up your 904 Passport and spend the day exploring the amazing people, organizations and local pride that make the 904 so special.

This one-day-only event is all about celebrating what makes our community special—our people, our passions, and our purpose. Discover and connect with local nonprofits making a real difference every day. Stop by our booth to hear about exciting activities on the horizon for Orange Park!

The event will feature:

- Live DJ music and an upbeat atmosphere
- Performances by the Rolling Gems
- Giveaways and surprise prize moments

Quarterly Member Meeting: An Armchair Tour of Some Special Orange Park Residents

Join us for a special presentation on Monday, October 19th at 6 PM at the Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Avenue as we travel through history from the comfort of a chair. Learn the stories of some of the colorful, past residents of the Orange Park community, told by a variety of different voices. This presentation will allow folks who are not comfortable walking around the cemetery a chance to hear about these individuals with a visual backdrop. These residents will not be featured at Moonlight on Magnolia this year as we simply cannot cover all the personalities in the scope of a walk. More details will be in the October newsletter.

Moonlight on Magnolia Needs You!

It will soon be fall and that means it's almost time for Moonlight on Magnolia. This event provides visitors an opportunity to tour Magnolia Cemetery to learn about our town's history and meet "former residents" to hear stories of their time in Orange Park. A committee is now being formed among members to help organize and run these annual historical walks through Magnolia Cemetery. This is a much-anticipated event that requires a lot of helpers. We need folks to help with planning, publicity, and execution, including set-up and take down, group organization, front-table management as well as tour guides and performers. If you are interested, contact Cindy Cheatwood at ckcheatwood@hotmail.com. The event is scheduled for October 24th, beginning with set up at 3 PM.

It's Finally Here!

Three years in the making, the Nelson Point Historical Marker has arrived from the foundry! The marker tells the story of one of the most historically significant tracts of Orange Park land. A date for its unveiling at Rob Bradley Conservation Park at Nelson Point is currently being determined. Stay tuned for more!

Orange Park Memories, By Cindy Cheatwood

Each month of this year, we recognize one historic home in Orange Park. This month, in honor of POW/MIA Recognition Day on Sept. 19, 2026, we are featuring the **John McCain House** at 553 Fatio Lane in Orange Park. The house, built in 1958, is a 4-bedroom, 3 bath ranch style, rich in architectural character. It features the influence of Robert C. Broward, the celebrated Jacksonville architect, blending Florida traditions with modern features incorporating the natural world.

Broward's thoughtful mid-century modern details are obvious. With a low, sheltering roofline, featuring generous overhanging eaves, it fosters shade and channels rainwater away from the foundation, one of Broward's lifelong obsessions. Clerestory windows sit high above eye level, bringing natural light and ventilation while also providing privacy. This is a nod to what he admired in architect Frank Lloyd Wright's work.



Inside the house there are exposed wood beams and natural finishes, with a long horizontal focus to make the rooms feel larger. The living and dining spaces flow together in an open plan, rare for mid-century Orange Park, anchored by a brick feature wall with a fireplace and built-in shelving. The compact, efficient kitchen looks over the backyard through a wide picture window framed in cypress.

The bedrooms follow a classic Florida ranch pattern with pocket doors to save space, carefully placed windows for cross-ventilation, and built-in storage spaces. The master bedroom opens on a small, screened porch, another Broward specialty.



It was in this thoughtfully crafted 2,100 square-foot home that Carol McCain raised her children during the years her husband, Navy pilot John McCain, served overseas. This home, along with the community, provided stability and comfort when John was shot down over Hanoi in 1967.

When John McCain returned from captivity in 1973, he stepped back into American life here, in Orange Park. Today, 553 Fatio Lane is a meaningful piece of Orange Park's architectural and civic history.

Veterans Corner, By Sandra DiGiovanni

Veteran's Corner is changing the message this month. With three events honoring veterans occurring before the end of the year, it's time to highlight one of them.

This year, National Wreaths Across America Day will be held on Saturday, December 19, 2026, at the Veterans Memorial. The ceremony will begin at 11:45 AM. Now is the time to join millions of volunteers and supporters who will gather to Remember, Honor and Teach at Magnolia Cemetery and Moosehaven Cemetery.



We are well on our way towards our goal but still need help. If you are looking to honor a veteran in either cemetery you can donate a wreath to a veteran or to a specific veteran of your choice.

Click on the following links to donate wreaths to your preferred cemetery:

Magnolia Cemetery

<https://wreathscrossamerica.org/pages/171281/Overview/?relatedId=0>

Moosehaven Cemetery

<https://wreathscrossamerica.org/pages/175388/Overview/?relatedId=0>

Once you have indicated the number of wreaths you wish to purchase, click “Next” to verify number of wreaths and the designated cemetery then click “Next” and follow the instructions for “Customizations.” Should you wish to place a wreath on the grave of a specific veteran, click on “Grave Specific” and provide the information on the veteran you would like to honor. Finally, select “I will place myself” and continue to the payment portion of your request. This ensures you will have a wreath to place on your veteran’s grave on December 19, 2026.

What does it mean to sponsor a wreath? Sponsoring a veteran’s wreath is a personal gift of gratitude and remembrance for someone who served this country so that we can be free. Your sponsorship supports the yearlong mission to remember the fallen, honor those who served, and teach the next generation the value of freedom.

We already have commitments from three youth groups to participate this year. The Black Creek Young Marines, Boy Scout Troop 25 and Cub Scout Pack 25 have confirmed they are ready to volunteer. As always, we have several local businesses that are now 4-year & 5-year sponsors. Their continued contributions make this event better every year.

Please feel free to reach out should you have any questions, concerns or would like to play a role in our successful ceremony. You may contact Sandra DiGiovanni, Location Coordinator, Wreaths across America for Magnolia Cemetery & Moosehaven Cemetery. Phone: 904 699-2305, Email: sanbar75@me.com.

The Carolyn Day Essay Contest for Clay County Students

It’s time again for our annual Veterans Day Essay Contest. This year, the contest has been renamed the **Carolyn Day Essay Contest** in honor of our dear friend, Carolyn Ann Day, who was the driving force behind the construction of our town’s Veterans Memorial. The purpose of the contest is to give young people the opportunity to explore the importance of celebrating Veterans and Veterans Day.

Students submitting the winning essays will receive a certificate, a cash prize and be invited to read their essay at the Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11. Essay materials can be found on our website, www.ophistory.org.



Community Night at Firehouse Subs



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**20% of your event sales back to the
Historical Society of Orange Park**

Excludes third party orders (DoorDash, GrubHub, UberEats, etc)



**Join us at our table during
the event to get the scoop on
our upcoming activities**

Tuesday, Sept. 22nd, 5:00-9:00 PM

Green House (Clarke Cottage) Renovation, By Cindy Cheatwood

It's almost done! We are very excited about the progress being made with the renovation of Clarke Cottage (1925). The windows were reinstalled and looked amazing, there are new ceiling fans and lights overhead in each room, the fully-ADA compliant bathroom is complete, and the wood floors look wonderful! There are still a few things for the Town to finish up but as the funds for the project are depleted, there are some needs that can only be met with the help of our friends. The basic supplies of cleaning materials, paper towels, and garbage bags must be donated. Aesthetic items such as rugs and mats will protect the floors during heavy use and add warmth to the charm of the building. A wish list has been established for this purpose.



Please visit our Clarke Cottage Wish List at https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1Q9UIHHJVB3S?ref=list_d_wl_lfu_nav_3 or you may access the list via your mobile phone using this QR code.

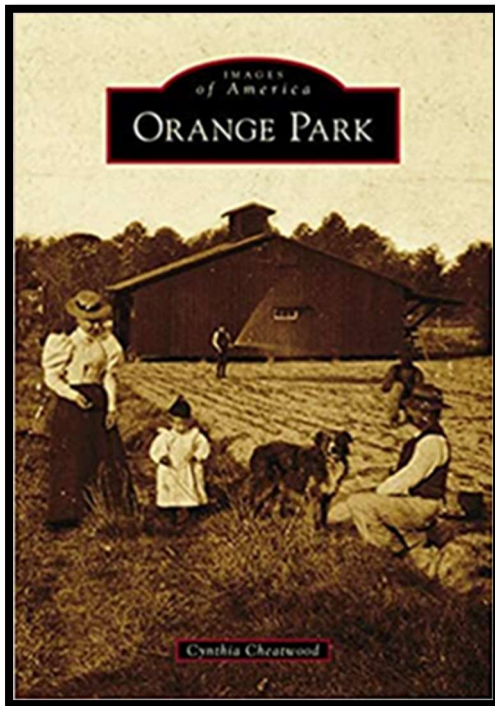


Look For Us Online

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.

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.

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.

Clarke House Tours

Historic Clarke House Tours are held the second Sunday of each month from 2 PM to 4 PM. A quiet Sunday afternoon is the perfect time for a



leisurely tour of the house, both up- and downstairs. It's free and guided by members of the Historical Society of Orange Park. Private Guided Tours are available to homeschool, civic and social groups! To schedule a free guided tour, contact the Historical Society of Orange Park at info@ophistory.org. Groups will be scheduled based on the availability of guides.

Upcoming Open House Dates:

- September 13 - Grandparents Day- what a wonderful way to step back in time with the grands and enjoy memories of a time gone by.
- October 11
- November 8



Links to Local History

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

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

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