



The Historical Society of Orange Park

June 2026 Newsletter

June is here! The children are out of school and we welcome summer once again. There are several opportunities for those interested in local and national history this month. The Society will host its monthly Open House at the Clarke House on Sunday, June 14. Area residents will also have an opportunity to visit the Freedom Truck in Green Cove Springs from June 15 – 17. You can read more about these events in this newsletter. Also included in our newsletter are recaps of May’s events as well as a history of the Carnes House and stories about local veterans and early mayors of Orange Park.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
June 14, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 15, 2026	12:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Freedom Truck	Clay County Courthouse
June 16 & 17, 2026	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Freedom Truck	Clay County Courthouse
July 12, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
August 9, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Historical Society of Orange Park Awards Scholarship, By Cindy Cheatwood

Thursday, May 14th was a special evening of recognitions for this year's graduating seniors of Orange Park High School. Among the awards distributed was the first ever Historical Society of Orange Park Scholarship for \$1000. The Society is very grateful to Dairy Queen of Orange Park and Bogers Shoes for their corporate sponsorship making up half of the award. The recipient is Miss Rebecca Chapman, this year's Miss Orange Park High, a talented young woman who amassed over 2000 hours of community service while a student at OPHS. Rebecca will be attending Florida Gulf Coast University where she will pursue a degree in tourism and hospitality management. Among her many titles, she served as president of the national Jr. Honor Society of OPHS as well as president of the International Thespian Society. She is a truly deserving student and we wish her the very best!



Members Tea Party, By Cindy Cheatwood

It was such a lovely spring day on May 7th that the Society set up our Membership Tea on Mrs. Clarke's decorated screen porch. A gentle breeze and the overhead fans made for a comfortable, congenial environment. Guests were offered hats to enhance the experience. Lots of goodies were available as well as a variety of tea flavors with an individual pot for each of four tables of guests. Bob Scallan provided a charming "*What is it?*" game with photos of unusual historical items for tables to discuss and try to identify. A specially prepared game of *MadLibs* was played, as was done at last year's Tea Party, with lots of laughs to go around. Many thanks to Sandra DiGiovanni and Bob Scallan for helping Cindy Cheatwood with the set up. To everyone who brought goodies to share, thank you!

**Magnolia Cemetery Tour – Veterans to Mayors: A Call to Service, By Sandra DiGiovanni**

On Saturday, May 16, the Historical Society of Orange Park held a small tour of Magnolia Cemetery for some of the town's ardent cemetery lovers.

Beginning with the only family with three generations of veterans in Magnolia Cemetery, the Douglass/Walker family, our group heard about 1st generation veteran Reynalder Douglass and his

contributions to the Meuse-Argonne offensive that helped end the conflict in 1918. As a part of the 807th Pioneer Infantry Regiments, Reynalder was in one of several African American units to see combat in WWI.

The family's second generation included Reynalder's two nephews, William & Freddy Walker. William served in the United States Army and Freddie served in the U.S. Navy.

The third generation was Freddy Walker Sr.'s son Clarence who did 2 tours of duty with the U.S. Army in Viet Nam.

The tour continued next with early town mayors. If you have never heard of these mayors, you are not alone. Beginning with James Marson (1883-1884), an early town resident, he and his wife Anna and young daughter probably arrived in the area in 1875. James was a builder and he was responsible for many of the early homes built in the soon to be town. Not to be outdone by her husband, Anna worked alongside James building homes as well as digging artesian wells for homes in Jacksonville and Orange Park. In 1924, Anna was the person selected to throw the switch that brought electricity to the town.



Another early mayor was Joseph Parks (1889-1891).

Joseph was from Scotland and was a part-time resident of the town splitting time with Birmingham, Alabama. He was eager for local farmers to make more money from the sugar cane they grew and had plans to open a sugar mill. That became a reality by partnering with our next mayor, John Eldridge (1897-1898 & 1901-1902). John purchased 600 acres of land from the defunct Florida Winter Home & Improvement Co. in 1889 and, along with Joseph Parks and several investors from his hometown of Boston, construction began that year.

Sadly, John Eldridge never got to see his mill operational as he died in early 1902 and the mill did not become operational until late 1902. But the mill was successful for several years with Joseph Parks as the local manager. By 1912, the out-of-town owners closed the mill and put the property up for sale.

We can now look at another early Mayor, Clarence Marshall (1912-1919). Clarence was a US Navy veteran who served from 1899 until 1903. He and his family were winter visitors from New York until 1920 when he relocated permanently. In 1912 Clarence became Vice President for Island View Company, the company that had purchased the land formally known as the Eldridge Sugar Mill. He held that position for many years, often getting paid with property.

Our last visit in the cemetery is an area dubbed "The Pearl Harbor Triangle." Having three veterans that served during WWII and stationed at Pearl Harbor during 1941 is quite an honor for the cemetery.

Ronald Kingry was a 30-year US Navy veteran stationed on the USS McDonough on December 7, 1941. His ship was not damaged during the attack and it was able to shoot down a Japanese plane and make its way out of the harbor in search of the Japanese fleet.

Randall Cecil Roush joined the US Navy in 1938 and served for 30 years before mustering out May 30, 1968. He was assigned to the USS Astoria in September 1941. The Astoria sailed out of Pearl Harbor on December 5, 1941, headed for Midway Island.

Arthur Gilbert is our final Pearl Harbor survivor. Arthur was assigned to the USS Arizona on December 7, 1941. He credits his survival to being in one of the gun turrets during the attack. Most of the men in his unit survived because of their location.

Next time you find yourself in the cemetery, take the time to visit these veterans and mayors.

Memorial Day Ceremony, By Sandra DiGiovanni

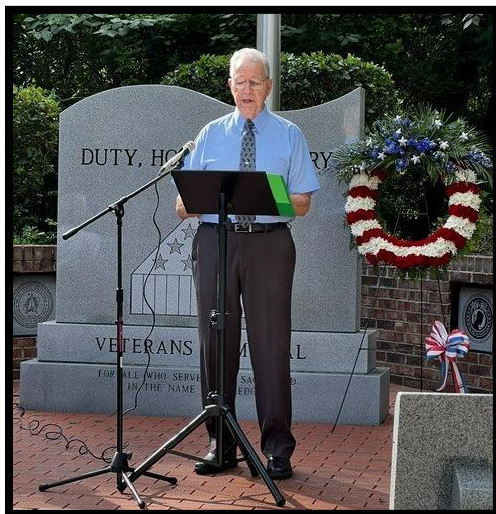
On Monday, May 25, 2026, the Town of Orange Park along with the Orange Park Fire Department celebrated Memorial Day at the Veterans Memorial in Magnolia Cemetery. Our newly elected Mayor, Winnette Sandlin began the ceremony by welcoming everyone. Also in attendance was our newly elected Vice-Mayor, Doug Benefield. The ceremony drew local residents, veterans, members of the Orange Park Fire Department and other community members.

We were honored to have Rev. David Tarkington of 1st Baptist Church of Orange Park and Chaplain of Orange Park Police & Fire Department present the Invocation and Benediction. The Orange Park Fire Department Honor Guard presented the Colors and Rev. Tarkington led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Kiley Taylor sang the National Anthem before our guest speaker was introduced.



Mayor Sandlin addresses the audience.



CAPT. Dick Sidney, USN (Ret.)

Captain Dick Sidney, U.S. Navy (Ret.) spoke eloquently about the history of Memorial Day. He continued by reminding us of some of the notable events that happened during wars the United States was a participant. From the poppies of Flanders Field to Pearl Harbor and D-Day, and his own memories of being “in country” during the Viet Nam War, Captain Sidney reminded us of all the sacrifices our military has endured.

He shared his own story of one of his fellow Navy officers who went down during Viet Nam. United States Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade David Gollahon, died in 1968 when the Navy attack helicopter he was piloting 10 miles south of Saigon experienced engine failure resulting in a water landing, whereupon the aircraft capsized and sank. John was a member of the Helicopter Attack (L) Squadron 3 (Seawolves).



Orange Park Fire Department



Members of VFW 5968

As a young officer, Sidney was tasked with escorting the body of his friend, United States Navy Lt. Junior Grade David Gollohan, back to the states for burial. Sidney was there to support the family and present the American flag during the funeral for Lt. Gollahon. After the service, Sidney returned to Viet Nam.

Captain Sidney provided a bit of Flag trivia when he educated attendees about why the flag was fully hoisted and then placed at half-mast. Tradition dictates that on Memorial Day, the flag remains at half-mast until noon, when it is then raised to the top. Also, the Captain asked us to have a moment of silence at 3PM in honor of all our veterans.

Please give big "Thank You" to American Legion 250 Riders for their flag waving greeting to all attendees. We also thank VFW 5968 for providing and placing 266 flags on the graves of veterans laid to rest in Magnolia Cemetery.



American Legion Post #250 Riders

Honor a Veteran—Leave a Lasting Legacy



Now is a wonderful time to order a legacy paver in honor of a veteran who has touched your life. Each engraved paver will become a permanent part of the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery, preserving their service and sacrifice for generations to come. Consider placing a tribute that tells their story and ensures their legacy is remembered. Order forms are available at the Veterans memorial or via our website at <https://ophistory.org/veterans-memorial>. Please note that all engraved pavers ordered by **July 31** will be

installed prior to this year's Veterans Day Ceremony.

Orange Park Memories, By Cindy Cheatwood



The Jesse V. Carnes House, located at 1506 River Blvd., was constructed about 1912 on land which was once owned by Benjamin F. Stiles of New York. Stiles was one of the most prominent citrus growers and real estate developers in the Orange Park area during the post-Civil War Period.

The 3-bedroom, 1.5 bath Colonial Revival home was constructed for Jesse V. Carnes and his wife, Mary Grace Carnes. Carnes came to Florida from Steubenville, Ohio in 1893. He initially settled at Jacksonville, where he opened a fish processing plant under the name J.V. Carnes Company. He

moved to Orange Park in 1904 and there continued operation of his business.

Carnes was a leading political figure in Orange Park during the early twentieth century. He served as town mayor for many years and as a town commissioner.

His first fishing business site in Orange Park was a two story building on the town pier at the end of Kingsley Ave. In 1914 the plant was moved to what we now call Nelson Point, on Doctors Lake. With room to expand, J.V. Carnes Co. became the hub for a rapidly growing commercial fishing industry in the area. On early mornings the catch gathered the night before was unloaded, headed, gutted, weighed and a price negotiated on the spot. Waste was piled up on the beach and the rest packed in boxes with ice and moss and loaded into waiting trucks which lit out for Jacksonville and points unknown.



In 1922 the Carnes sold their home and it went through several other owners. In 1935 it was sold to the Southern District Home for Aged British, a group that provided, within the State of Florida, a home for aged men and women of British birth or British ancestry not exceeding two generations from British residency.



The home retains its original charm in many ways. Hardwood floors throughout most of home, and a huge walk-in pantry reflect the early 1900s. There are features such as the eat-in-kitchen, dining room, family room with fireplace and seating area at top of stairs that add charm to the home. Shingle siding and shingle roof makes the house stand out among the historic homes on River Road.

National Preservation Month, By Cindy Cheatwood

On May 17th, the Preservation Board of Orange Park joined with the Historical Society of Orange Park in recognition of National Historical Preservation Month. A proclamation was delivered, and local preservation was discussed with visitors to our shared booth at the Farmer's Market at Town Hall Park. Coloring sheets depicting Orange Park's historic homes were given to the kids. Colorful paddle fans were shared, and yard signs were given to folks with historic homes in Orange Park.



Green House (Clarke Cottage) Renovation Underway, By Cindy Cheatwood

After years of waiting, The "green house," aka Clarke Cottage, is finally getting the repairs it has needed for too long. Interior repairs are being made to make the structure a usable space for small group use. Flooring, roof and plumbing repairs have begun and a handicap ramp will soon be installed. We are very grateful to the Town of Orange Park for honoring the important historical legacy of the building as the only remaining worker housing from the days of Clarke's Pecan Grove. Check back next month for more!



Clarke House Sign, By Bob Scallan

The Historical Society serves as the custodian of the Clarke House, holding its monthly board meetings there along with several annual events. We also host a monthly open house, welcoming curious guests who want to learn more about this historic home.

Oddly enough, until recently there was no signage identifying the volunteers serving as docents—and no sign displaying the name of the house itself. That changed with the installation of a new yard sign that now proudly shares the home's name, the year it was built, the organization hosting the tours, and the date the Historical Society was formed.

We hope this new informational sign will help attract even more visitors to the historic Clarke House.



Clay County Historical Society – Railroad Festival, By Bob Scallan

After a 16-year hiatus, the Clay County Historical Society proudly revived the Railroad Festival in celebration of its 60th anniversary. Held on May 9th, the event featured character actors, historic Model A and Model T automobiles, a 1940s fire truck and police car, WWII jeeps, hands-on demonstrations including shawl-making and rope-making, musical entertainment, a wide variety of vendors, and several food trucks. One of the highlights of the day was the reenactment of J.C. Penney, purchasing 120,000 acres of land in 1925 at an auction held on the old courthouse steps. The auction was officiated by local attorney Leonidas Wade - played by Clay County Historical Society President, John Bowles.

Although a high chance of rain kept many visitors away, a strong and enthusiastic crowd still turned out to support the festival. The planning committee is already looking forward to an even bigger and better event next year.



Freedom Truck to Visit Clay County

This month, the Freedom Truck will visit Clay County. The "Freedom Truck", one of six such vehicles nationwide, is an 18-wheeler mobile museum touring the U.S. to celebrate America's 250th anniversary. The Freedom 250 tour aims to focus on the story of American sovereignty and independence and the traveling museums are designed to bring American history into local communities and schools. The exhibit teaches American history and the founding values through interactive displays such as:

- Digital Exhibits: A Wall of 50 American Heroes and touchscreen quizzes.
- Immersive History: An artificial intelligence George Washington who discusses the American Revolution.
- Founding Documents: Giant kiosks where visitors can digitally sign the Declaration of Independence.



The Freedom Truck will be at the Clay County Courthouse, 477 Houston Street, Green Cove Springs, Florida, from June 15 to June 17, 2026.

You can visit the mobile museum during the following hours:

June 15: 12:00 PM – 5:00 PM

June 16: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

June 17: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

For more information on the Freedom Truck and the Freedom 250 Initiative, please visit <https://freedom250.org/>.

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.

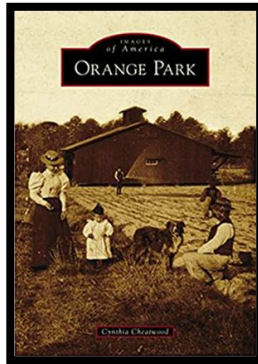
Got pics?

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.



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

Please join us Sunday, June 14, from 2 PM to 4 PM to tour the Clarke House. The Clarke House, built in 1912, served as the family home for William and Carrie Clarke for many years. It features hardwood floors, plaster 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.



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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