



The Historical Society of Orange Park

April 2026 Newsletter

We hope you are enjoying our beautiful spring weather and making the most of every opportunity to be outside during this pleasant time of year. After a busy start to the year, we continue with activities in April. This month features our regular open house at the Clarke House on April 12. That is followed by our next Quarterly Member Meeting on April 14 at the Orange Park Library. More activities are on the way for May. In the meantime, enjoy reading about the Zwirner House, the Orange Park music scene in the 1960's, a recap of our annual Carrie Clarke Day event and our upcoming events.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
April 12, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
April 14, 2026	6:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
April 25, 2026	10:00 AM – 3:00 PM	Bartram Frolic Outing	Palatka
May 7, 2026	10:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Member Tea Party	Clarke House
May 9, 2026	10:00 AM – 4:00 PM	Railroad Day Festival	Green Cove Springs
May 10, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
May 17, 2026	10:00 AM – 3:00 PM	Farmers Market Booth	Town Hall Park
June 14, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Quarterly Member Meeting – Orphans in Orange Park: Tracking Down the Story



Join the Historical Society of Orange Park as we sew together decades of local history to link nuns and needy kids to this estate on River Road.

Tuesday, April 14th, 6 PM at the Orange Park branch library, 2054 Plainfield Ave, Orange Park, FL 32073.

What started as a simple question developed into a very satisfying and significant part of Orange Park history

Members Opportuni-Tea Party**MEMBERS ONLY OPPORTUNI-TEA**

May 7, 2026 10 AM Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Ave.



You are invited to a tea party!

We miss Clarke House fellowship! Let's get together to share each other's company. New members can meet long-timers and memories

No cost, no need to bring anything.

Let us know you are coming at info@ophistory.org or call Cindy at 904.707.0822.

Carrie Clarke Day

On Sunday, March 8, the Historical Society of Orange Park celebrated Carrie Clarke Day at Clarke House Park. This day is set aside to honor a prominent resident of Orange Park, Mrs. Carrie Clarke. Carrie was a fixture in the community. She and her husband, William, built their home on Kingsley Avenue in 1912. Mr. Clarke owned a successful plumbing business in Jacksonville and they wanted to live "in the country." With the advent of the automobile and a recently opened, paved road from Jacksonville to Orange Park, Mr. Clarke was able to commute to work. In addition to the plumbing business, the Clarkes farmed their property in Orange Park. They shipped pecans and other produce by rail up the east coast. Carrie Clarke was highly active in the community serving in several service organizations and lending her home to help establish both the First Baptist Church of Orange Park and Orange Park Presbyterian Church. She also opened her home as a wedding venue when needed. She was always happy to help and was well-loved in the community.

This year's Carrie Clarke event featured several activities for the community. As always, the historic Clarke House was open for tours. The Green House, which housed farm workers in earlier days, served as a mini-museum featuring displays on local history. Eugene Nix, Wanda Dillaberry and Steve Ferguson led a group of local musicians that entertained visitors with a variety of folk music. There were also

several games for younger visitors including an opportunity to make giant soap bubbles, which proved to be a favorite activity with kids of all ages. Of course, Carrie Clarke Day would not be complete without our annual poll on the proper way to pronounce “pecan.” “Pee-can” was a resounding victory over “puh-kahn” as the local preference.

We offer thanks to our volunteers that made the event a success. HSOP volunteers included Cindy Cheatwood, Bob Scallan, Susanna Thompson, Sandra DiGiovanni, Julie Smithers and Van Hogan. Our thanks also go to Kiera Hammons, Ava Nazario, Ivy Carroll, Daisha Smith, Camila Arreola, all members of the National Junior Honor Society as well as Paige Iacob, their faculty sponsor. A special thanks goes to Al and Desiree Allen and their crew who worked hard in their food truck providing delicious barbeque for the event. Lastly, we thank the community of Orange Park and all our visitors for supporting this event. We could not do it without you!



Good music always makes for a relaxing, enjoyable day.



The opportunity to make huge soap bubbles proved irresistible to our younger visitors.



Bob Scallan and Sandra DiGiovanni met with visitors and shared information about the Clarke family and their home.





Cindy Cheatwood shared local history with visitors to the Green House.



The great Pecan Debate is always a fun activity for bragging rights.

Thank you, Garden Club of Orange Park



Recent cold snaps all but destroyed the Clarke House front garden and our friends at the Garden Club came to the rescue! Sue Miller and her team cleared out the dead plants, pruned, weeded and replanted, making the garden something Mrs. Clarke would have been proud to see. Mrs. Clarke, a long-time member of the Garden Club, was well represented in their efforts.

Orange Park Memories

The Historical Society is highlighting Orange Park’s historic houses each month of 2026. This month we feature the Zwirner House, located at 1400 Plainfield Ave.

The history of 1400 Plainfield Avenue began in the early 1880s, when Washington Gano Benedict sold nine acres to Edward and Amanda Clark of Flint, Michigan in 1881. A year later, they sold the north half of that tract to Erastus and Anna Dodge, also of Flint. These early owners were part of the wave of Northern investors who bought Orange Park land in the 1880s development boom but never settled on it. The Clarks died of typhoid pneumonia in 1884 and for decades, the parcel remained raw, unimproved land.

The first actual residents were immigrants from Eastern Europe. Frederick Joseph “Fred” Zwirner fled Austria during the First World War as a pacifist who chose not to fight. Coming from a prominent Viennese family, he was smuggled out with the help of friends, first into Germany, then England, and finally onto a ship bound for New York. There he met Pauline Pausz, a spirited young woman from the Schwabenland region of Germany, who would later be his wife.



Pauline could not read or write when she arrived here and spoke little English. Fred taught her to sign her name. They moved to Orange Park to build a farm. They sold milk for 12 cents a quart and eggs for 12 cents a dozen. Pauline's herb garden was expansive and considered her "pharmacy" for teas and potions. Fred's mother, Barbara Zwirner, lived with them, much to Pauline's chagrin. Barbara remained with them until her death in 1926.

The home they lived in was built between 1915 and 1922. The Zwirners were the first long-term occupants and likely builders of the original

home. Once the farm was established, Fred became an inventor of mechanical devices. Beginning in 1929, Jacksonville newspapers recorded his inventions aimed at improving leaf springs, load distribution, and vibration control in early automobiles and trucks. His inventions, including the Oscillating Spacer, Loadbalancer, Waveline-Spring, Triangle-Spring Combination, and Springpower Equalizer, demonstrate his knowledge of mechanical challenges of his time.

The home reflects the practical, owner-built construction typical of the late 1910s, when families cleared their own land, milled local lumber, and built homes suited to the climate and the rhythms of daily life. It's a one-and-a-half-story wood-frame house with a simple rectangular footprint and a gabled roofline. The exterior is wrapped in horizontal wood siding. The roof was likely cedar or metal when first built, with generous eaves to offer shade and protect from heavy rain. The two front dormers weren't decorative, but functional. They brought light into the attic, allowed heat to escape, and made the space usable for storage or overflow sleeping.

The back service area likely had open shelving for jars and tools, a wash basin, hooks for drying herbs and a screened section to keep insects out.

The front porch was an outdoor living room, a place to cool off in the evenings, greet neighbors, and shell peas or mend tools in the shade. Its posts are simple and functional, reflecting the Zwirners' frugal, practical approach to building. The ceilings were high not for curb appeal, but to allow heat to rise during Florida summers.

Life on the property reflected the couple's European roots and their adaptation to Florida's landscape. Over time, later owners made additions and updates, but the house, its frame, its proportions, its porch, and its relationship to the land reflect an early homestead. It is not a Victorian house from 1895, as modern real-estate listings sometimes claim, but a true Plainfield Avenue farmhouse: practical, modest, and shaped by the hands and lives of the immigrant family who settled there.

In 1982, two years after Pauline's death, the property was sold. The Martyniaks are likely the next owners, but the Gregson family lived there from the 1990s to 2015, when the Clays bought it. Finally, in 2019

ownership went to the Johnny Van Zant Revocable Living Trust, owners of other properties in the area as well.

The building is listed in the 1994 Historic Building Survey as one of the places in Orange Park that should be preserved for its significance to the history of Orange Park. It stands right across the street from Orange Park Elementary School, thus anchoring the past with the future.

Back in the Day,

By Eugene Nix

Back in the mid to late 60's some parental members of the Orange Park Lions Club, located on Stowe Ave. back then, would hold teen dances every Saturday night for the young people to have something to do in town. There were basically two local rock and roll bands in the Town of Orange Park those days and they would alternate playing every other Saturday.

I remember we each took home about \$10 each Saturday; admission to the dance I think was a buck. My band's name was first called the Gremlins and later, became The Six Teens. Wanda Dillaberry, Ronnie Mobley, Jim Plato, Buddy Frisbee, and Page Matherson had a group called the Daybreakers.

On occasion, a Jacksonville band would fill in. One of these was called the One Percent, later changing their name. They became the band who put Jacksonville on the world map, Lynyrd Skynyrd. All these groups, along with many others, would play the local teen dances in and around the tri-county area.



**R to L: Eugene Nix, Gary Eckford, Larry Jones,
Steve Ferguson, and Bill Brownell**

Ferguson, and Gary Hillard, have reunited as a quartet and meet up regularly to enjoy each other's company, reminisce over great memories of growing up in Orange Park, and make music together once again. Perhaps you will see them around town playing for their enjoyment and yours.

Other famous bands that arose from the Jacksonville scene were the Allman Brothers and .38 Special. Many of our musical bandmates and friends from those early days have since passed, but the ones remaining are still friends and enjoy reminiscing about the ole' glory days of our teen dances and the fun we had, never expecting to make it to any world stage. We were all just one big happy family of musicians having fun playing around town.

Somewhere in the late 70s, the Lion's Club ceased to have dances. The band members, after graduating from high school, went on to forge their own journeys. Most recently, four from those glory days, Eugene Nix, Wanda Dillaberry, Steve

If you lived and grew up here in the 60's, the Orange Park Lion's Club teen dances were a big part of your life and should always be remembered as joyful times.

Honor a Veteran—Leave a Lasting Legacy

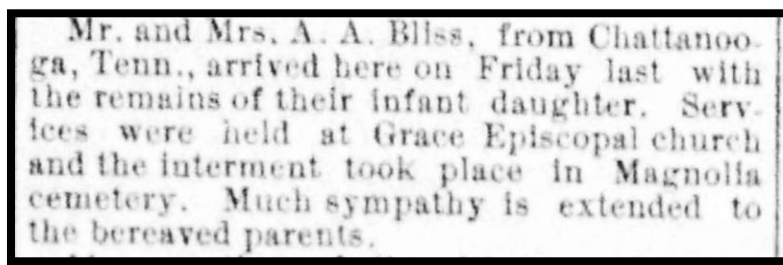


Now is a wonderful time to order a legacy paver in honor of a veteran who has touched your life. Each engraved paver will become a permanent part of the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery, preserving their service and sacrifice for generations to come. Consider placing a tribute that tells their 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>.

Veterans' Corner – Mystery Solved

By Sandra DiGiovanni

One of the interesting things about research is uncovering the unexpected. The original focus of this month's Veterans' Corner was W.H. Crockett, a Civil War veteran interred in Magnolia Cemetery. Research on Mr. Crockett led to the discovery of the adjacent item in the Florida Times-Union dated May 26, 1892.



Cemetery records show the Bliss name connected to Lot 165 in Magnolia cemetery. A visit to Lot 165 reveals three small, unmarked graves, indicating the burial of children. Who were these children and why would a couple from Chattanooga Tennessee bring their infant daughter to Orange Park for burial? The search down the "rabbit hole" began.

We start with Rev. Oliver Taylor, a Canadian by birth, who emigrated to the United States. Rev. Taylor was a priest in the Episcopal Church and served as Chaplain of the 5th Michigan Infantry during the Civil War. He was captured and taken prisoner following the Battle of Gettysburg and served three months as a prisoner before he was exchanged and released. He served with our own General Joseph T. Copeland, another Union veteran of the Civil War who lived in Orange Park. After the war, Rev. Taylor returned to Pine Lake, Michigan where he resided until 1879 when he sought a less "rigorous" climate in Florida and settled in Orange Park.

Another interesting fact, Oliver Taylor was the older brother of Heber Taylor, husband of General Copeland's daughter, Agnes. Heber Taylor died in Orange Park and is buried in lot 179, Magnolia Cemetery.

Rev. Taylor's connections with his brother, Heber, and General Copeland, likely explain why he chose Orange Park when he left Michigan.

Rev. Taylor and his second wife Helen had six (6) daughters. His second daughter, Alice, was married to Charles Lord. Their first child, a son, Charles, was born in January 1887. Unfortunately, the child died in April 1887 and was buried in Lot 165, which was owned by his grandfather, Rev. Oliver Taylor.

Rev. Taylor's youngest daughter, Grace, married Joseph R. Underwood in Orange Park in March 1888. They had a baby boy in June 1890. The baby died in childbirth and was also buried in Lot 165.

Rev. Taylor's middle daughter, Helen Florence, married Arthur A. Bliss in Orange Park in November 1890, this is the Bliss family mentioned in the original article. The couple had settled in Chattanooga and when their 3-month-old daughter, Helen, died in 1892. Helen's remains were transported to Orange Park and buried in the family plot (Lot 165) with her cousins.

Rev. Taylor died in Orange Park in 1891. His family chose to bury him in Greenwood Cemetery in Orlando, Florida where several of his daughters resided, leaving the three granddaughters to rest in Magnolia Cemetery.

The story does continue but not for this article. Family tragedies resulted in three young girls sharing a final resting place in Magnolia Cemetery. An unexpected discovery allowed us to identify the infants that are buried in Block 10, Lot 165 and share their family story.

Green House: Getting A Move On

After years of waiting, the worker's cottage on Clarke property is soon to receive much-needed attention. The Town has secured some funds that will begin the preservation process, securing the vulnerable areas of the substructure and roofing. Other preservation aspects will be addressed as the funding permits, with help from the Society as we are able. The goal is to make the structure safe for the community to use.

The first step was to clean out the rooms that were used to store supplies for activities of the Society. Cindy Cheatwood organized and coordinated three rooms into one cleanly packed collection area, ready to move. Thanks to Bob Scallan, Richard Cheatwood and Julie and Chuck Smithers for helping to load and move 3 carloads of smaller items into storage space! Thanks, Angel Corrales for advising which elements gathered by the Town should be marked to be saved before any demo could take place. As transportation became an issue for our larger items, John (Navigator Logistics) and Erika Lippincott (Sunteckts) stepped up by safely loading and transporting file cabinets and the glass display case. Thanks to Van Hogan for helping the Society move these bulky items from the Clarke Cottage into the rented storage space.



Bob Scallan, Julie Smithers and Chuck Smithers move items from the Green House into storage.

Historical Society of Orange Park Members Outing
April 25th, 10 AM – 3 PM, 900 St Johns Ave, Palatka, FL 32177



Road Trip! Join us for a Saturday adventure back in time to old Florida!

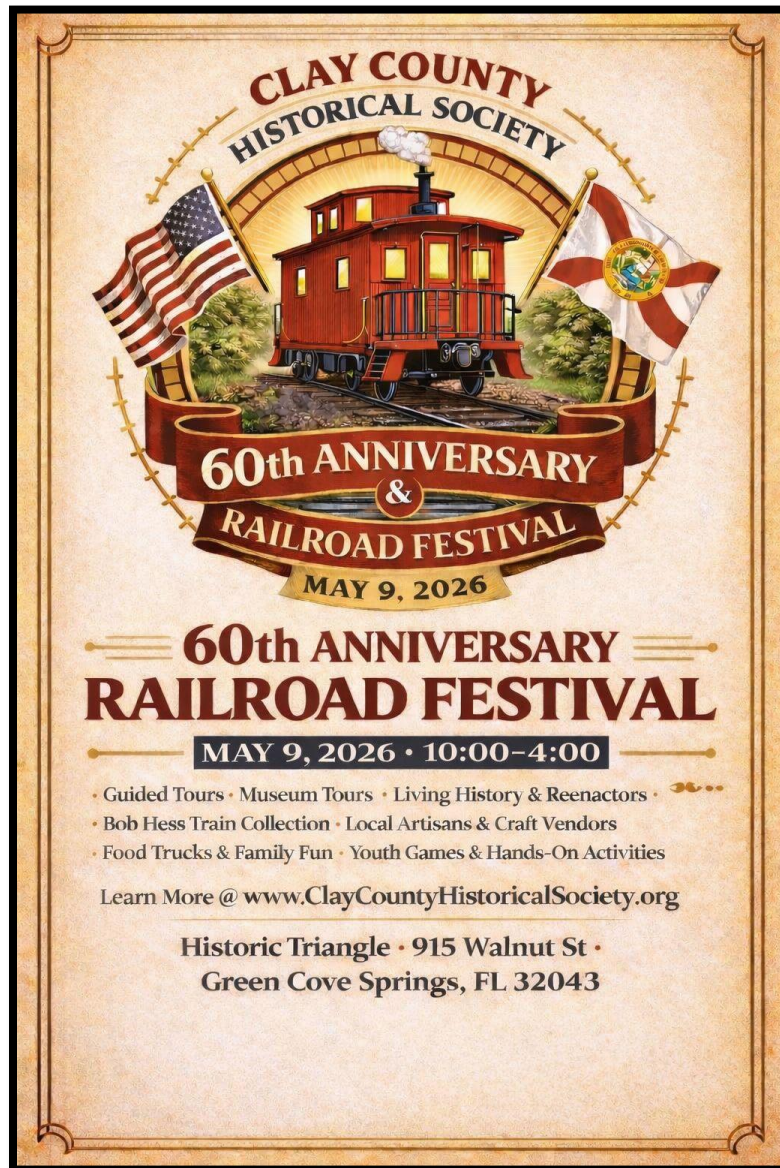
The Bartram Frolic & Festival honors the natural beauty, culture, and heritage that Bartram captured in his writings — encouraging visitors to reflect, explore, and engage with the St. Johns River in meaningful and recreational ways.

- Live Music & Performances
- Nature-Based Exhibitors
- “Passport to the Past” Adventures
- Living History Reenactors
- Local Vendors, Makers & Artisans
- Bartram Society Exhibits & Interpretive Experiences

Come stroll, listen, learn, and connect with the landscapes that shaped our history and still inspire us today.

Members can drive separately or join up to carpool. Meet up at 9:00 AM a location to be determined soon. Those in the carpool will return by 4:30 PM. If you are interested, please email Cindy Cheatwood, ckcheatwood@hotmail.com so we can keep you in the loop with updates.

Clay County Historical Society – Railroad Festival



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.

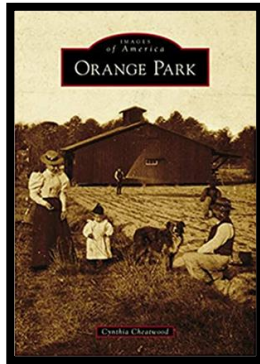
Got pics?

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, April 12, 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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