



The Historical Society of Orange Park

September 2025 Newsletter

As summer winds down, we look forward to cooler fall weather and familiar community activities. This month features our open house at the Clarke House on Sunday, September 14. Also, this month we will host our Quarterly Members Meeting at the Orange Park Library. The meeting will be held on September 18 at 6:00 PM and will feature a presentation on John and William Bartram's visits to this area in the 1760's and 1770's and a discussion on efforts to establish a Bartram Trail in Clay County.

Please don't forget that the Town of Orange Park's Annual Fall Festival and the Historical Society's Moonlight on Magnolia will be coming up in October. Volunteers will be needed so please help if you are able.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
September 14, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
September 18, 2025	6:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
October 12, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House/Music	Clarke House
October 18 & 19, 2025	10:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Fall Festival	Town Hall Park
October 25, 2025	4:00 PM - 6:00 PM	Moonlight on Magnolia	Magnolia Cemetery
November 9, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
November 11, 2025	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Veterans Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial

Orange Park Memories

The Historical Society is highlighting Orange Park businesses each month of 2025, sharing stories each month that feature one very old and one more familiar business in the town. This month we feature Wylie's Store and the Orange Park Mall.

James and Pauline Wylie came to Orange Park in 1912, having led a life of adventure as circus trapeze artists. They established a store on Kingsley Avenue that became the center of life for the town offering everyday necessities as well as a post office, soda fountain and electric repair shop (added in the 1920s). As the only store in the town for many years, Pauline knew more about its people than anyone.

The Orange Park Mall opened September 24, 1975, and celebrates its 50th anniversary this month! On opening day, traffic was lined up, bumper to bumper, along the newly constructed Wells Road as people from all over the area made their way to the new mall. With Ivey's, May-Cohens and Sears as anchors,

national chains Spencer's Gifts, Zales, Radio Shack, Frederick's of Hollywood, Stride-Rite, B. Dalton Bookseller and Body Shop leased space as well. Similar to Wylie's Store, the Orange Park Mall became a gathering place for the community. People went to the mall for shopping, food, entertainment and social activities. Can you remember the opening? Please share your memories with us at info@ophistory.org.



Wylie's Store



Orange Park Mall - 1975

September Quarterly Meeting - Bartram in Clay County



Source: <https://bartramtrailsociety.com/trail-site/the-doctors-lake-rob-bradley-conservation-park/>

SAVE THE DATE: Join us September 18th at the Orange Park branch library, starting at 6:00 PM for the start of an exciting journey...tracking John Bartram's travels through Clay County. Stop #1 on the Bartram in Clay County adventure was at Nelson Point, shown here. What adventure awaits!

Source: **John Bartram's Journal Entry for February 6, 1766**

"Set out for the Doctor's lake, which is half a mile or more broad, and 6 or 7 long; at the head of which is a large creek, about 100 or more yards broad, and near a mile and a half long, heading in a rich swamp with 3 or 4 branches, which drain it: On the west side there is a hammock of oak, hickory, magnolia, and hornbeam, and a fine spring of clear water almost big

enough to turn a mill, boiling up from under the main body of the country rocks, as all the great fountains do; the soil looks rich."

Join the Historical Society of Orange Park and Bartram Trail Society
Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025, at 6:00 pm
Orange Park branch library, 2054 Plainfield Ave, Orange Park

**BARTRAM'S
1766 VISIT
THROUGH
CLAY COUNTY, FL**

John and William Bartram traveled Doctor's Lake and down the St. Johns, recording what they saw. Come hear their story and learn about the Bartram Trail being created from Orange Park southward.



Special Open House Sunday, October 12th

Join us for a special treat on Sunday, October 12th at the historic Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Ave. for a very special open house. Three of Orange Park's longest-time residents will be "pickin'" songs on the Clarke House porch.

Eugene Nix and Steve Ferguson both grew up here from the early 1960's, starting first grade at Orange Park Elementary and graduated 12 years later from Orange Park High School. Wanda Dillaberry, who rounds out the musical trio, moved to Orange Park in 1965 and graduated from OPHS.



In the 1960's, the Orange Park Lion's Club, then located on Stowe Ave., held teen dances every Saturday night to give the youth something to do in town. There were basically two rock and roll bands then and they would play on an alternating basis. Eugene and Steve had a band called the Gremlins (later The Six Teens). Wanda was the female lead vocalist for a band called the Daybreakers. In the early 1970s the Lion's Club ceased the dances and the band members graduated and moved on in their life journeys, all the while continuing their love of making music. Wanda was the sole music entertainer when the Town of Orange Park started the annual Fall Festival. She remained in that role until 2012.

More recently, the three have rejoined as a trio and meet up regularly to enjoy each other's company and reminisce on their great memories of growing up in Orange Park. They are making music together once again.

The Historical Society of Orange Park hopes you will join us from 2-4 PM for our monthly Open House and enjoy Pickin'-on-the-Porch. Who knows, you may hear a story or two about the joy of growing up in 1960s Orange Park.

Moonlight on Magnolia, 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM



Orange Park Fall Festival

The Town of Orange Park will host the 43rd Annual Orange Park Fall Festival on Saturday, October 18 and Sunday, October 19, from 10 AM to 5 PM each day! The event features two full days of fun, food and music for the entire family. To learn more about the festival, please visit <https://opfallfestival.com/>. The Society will be hosting a booth again this year. Volunteers are needed to help us man the booth so please save the dates and help if you are able.



Historical Society Announces Essay Contest for Clay Students

The Historical Society of Orange Park, in recognition of Veterans Day, is sponsoring its annual essay contest for students in Clay County. The purpose of the contest is to give young people the opportunity to explore the importance of celebrating Veterans and Veterans Day using their own words and creativity. Essay materials can be found online at <http://ophistory.org/veterans.html>.

Winning essays will be recognized at the November 11, 2025, Veterans Day observance ceremony starting at 11 AM held at the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery, 1040 Kingsley Avenue in Orange Park.

Required paperwork for the contest is available on the website of the Historical Society of Orange Park, www.ophistory.org. Odds of winning will be determined by the number of entries received. Essays will be measured for: Expression of the theme (50%) Content of writing (25%) and Creativity of writing (25%).

The 2025 topics for each grade level are listed below. The contests will be evaluated in the following grade-related categories:



Grade	Word Limit	Topic	Cash Prize
4 th - 6 th	300 - 500	<i>What is Veterans Day?</i>	\$50
7 th - 8 th	400 - 700	<i>Why is Veteran's Day Necessary?</i>	\$75
9 th - 12 th	500 - 1000	<i>How Do Veterans Serve Our Country?</i>	\$100

Essay entries can be electronically written (Word or Docs) or handwritten neatly on white 8½" X 11" lined paper and must be in English. Please have students write on one side of the paper only. Handwriting on entries should be dark enough to be reproduced so that the judges will have a good copy to read. Please use ink, not pencil. All essays must be the work of only one (1) student, consisting of the student's own words, thoughts, and creativity. Electronic submissions are accepted. Note: Upon submission, all essays become the property of the Historical Society.

Clay Railroad History Added to Town Hall Display

When Elmer James donated the 8-foot long, 600-pound train model to the town of Orange Park in April, the Town asked for some history to go along with it. The Society pitched in and created a set of laminated sheets to lie on the shelf below the model. In a concise description, the new display explains the history of how Clay County's railroad system evolved. It includes an interesting map of the train line and some vintage photographs. Stop by and see it in the lobby of Town Hall!



Elmer Jones and Mayor Randy Anderson



Model Railroad Display with Clay County Railroad History

Veterans' Corner: Capers DeChamps Griffith

Magnolia Cemetery is home to 264 veterans as of August 2025. In this column we will be highlighting a veteran through both his or her military service and contributions made in civilian life.

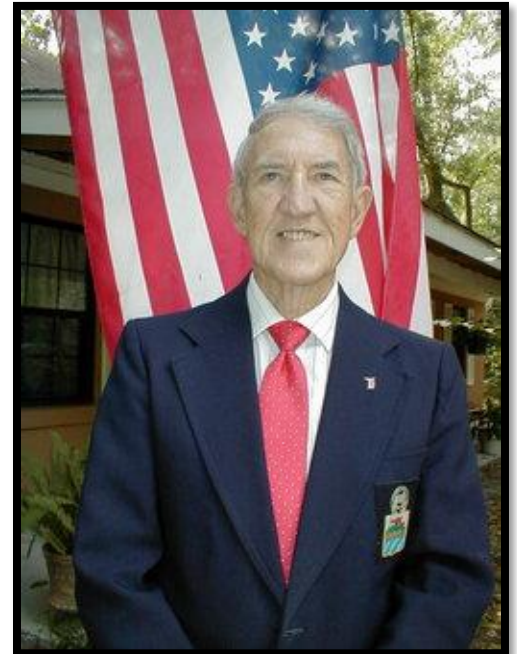
Most veterans will tell you that their service does not end at discharge. Veterans are known for their accomplishments after their military career is over. In each story we tell, it is important to cover both parts.

This month we are honoring Capers DeChamps Griffith.

Capers was born in Jacksonville on December 5, 1926. He joined the US Army in January of 1951 and served until September of 1954. He was an Officer Candidate School graduate at Ft. Benning, Ga. That was only the beginning of Capers education endeavors.

He graduated from Jacksonville University as an honor student and was a Charter student at UNF graduating with an Engineering/Management degree with a 4.0 GPA.

While still serving in the Army, he wed Edna Perkins on August 1, 1953, in Birmingham, Alabama. Edna has her own story to tell as she was the first woman elected to the Orange Park Town Council in 1992 and became mayor in 1994. She was instrumental in establishing the walking path on River Road. She is still active in the community of Orange Park. Capers would be proud.





In 1961 Capers was a civilian employee at Jacksonville Naval Air Station. He designed the station's official insignia as well as the insignia for the Naval Supply Center.

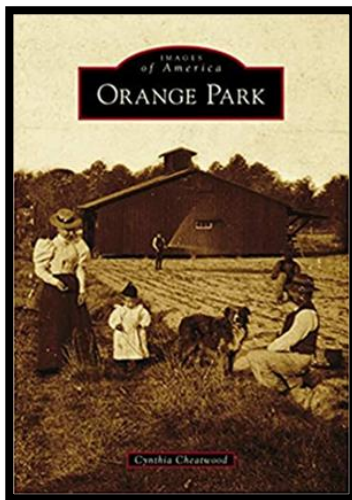
His skill as an artist was just one of his many talents.

He was a dedicated member of Grace Episcopal Church in Orange Park, serving as a Communicant, Chair, Lenten Missionary Offering in 1968, a Lay Reader from 1971-1974 and a Chalice Administrator in 1973.

He loved photography, archaeology, bridge, golf and travel. Capers' contributions have continued to be felt long after his death in 2009.

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, September 14 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 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](#)

Private Guided Tours of Historic Clarke House and Magnolia Cemetery Available

Homeschool, civic and social groups are welcome to schedule a free guided tour of the 1912 historic Clarke House and/or Magnolia Cemetery. For more information, contact the Historical Society of Orange Park at info@ophistory.org. Groups will be scheduled based on the availability of guides.

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