



The Historical Society of Orange Park

August 2025 Newsletter

It has been a busy summer for this Society! As we approach the dog days of summer, we are busily planning our fall activities. This month, we will once again host our open house at the Clarke House on Sunday, August 10. A lazy summer afternoon is a perfect time to invite a friend to the Clarke House and share the history of our town.

With the coming of August, we know that fall can't be far away. Our next Quarterly Members Meeting will be held in September followed by the Town of Orange Park's Annual Fall Festival and Moonlight on Magnolia. Volunteers will be needed so please help if you are able.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
August 10, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
September 14, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
September 18, 2025	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
October 12, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	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

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. Our August businesses are the Palmetto Factory and the Sisters' Tea Room.

The town's earliest businesses took advantage of the land's natural resources. On December 27, 1877 a patent was filed for "Machines for Treating Palmetto Leaves, Etc." by George Miller and Washington G. Benedict of Orange Park. It specified, "a new and useful Improvement in Machinery for Cutting, Stripping or Combing into Shreds all Varieties of Palmetto Leaves, Stalks, or Buds to be used in the manufacture and all upholstery purposes". The wooden palmetto factory building was located on McIntosh Street, near today's Moosehaven entrance. It employed women into the 1880's, making hats, bags, fans, and more from stripped palmetto leaves.

The Sisters Tea Room opened in 1974 at the corner of Smith and McIntosh Ave. in Orange Park. By 1979, it was obvious they needed more than 10 tables, so they decided to move to 906 Park Ave. Owners Gwen

Chojnacki and Bobbi Robbins kept the business going until 1993, making the best peanut butter pie anyone ever tasted. Many celebrations, showers, and family reunions were hosted by the sisters. Please share your memories in honor of all their amazing work with us at info@ophistory.org.



Palmetto Factory



Bobbi Robbins and Gwen Chojnacki of the Sisters Tea Room

September Quarterly Meeting - Bartram in Clay County

SAVE THE DATE: Join us September 18th at the Orange Park branch library, starting at 5:30 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:

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

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."

Clay County Historical Roundtable

On Friday, July 11, the Historical Society of Orange Park hosted the semi-annual Clay County Historical Roundtable at the Orange Park Library. In addition to our society, the following organizations were represented:

- Augusta Savage Center
- Clay County Archives
- Clay County Historical Preservation Board
- Clay County Historical Society
- Clay County Tourism
- Historical Preservation Board of Orange Park
- Keystone Heights Heritage Commission
- Middleburg Museum
- Palmetto Community Development Corp
- Penney Farms Historical Society
- Pleasant Point Cemetery Rescue

HSOP President, Cindy Cheatwood, served as moderator for the meeting. Several important topics were discussed.

In 1765 and 1774, John and William Bartram explored the St. Johns River, its tributaries and surrounding areas. Sites in what is now Clay County were included in their travels. Members of various county historical societies are investigating the process to have Clay County sites marked and included on the Bartram Trail. This will allow us to share the history of these early explorations of our area and promote tourism to Clay County. For more information, please visit [Clay County - Bartram Trail Society of Florida](https://www.claycountysocietyofbartramtrail.com/).

Another topic of common interest was the establishment of a Black History Museum in Clay County. Much of Clay County's Black history has been alternately overlooked or closely held through the years. A Black History Museum will provide a venue to highlight, display and preserve the many significant contributions of the Black community to our county's history. The biggest challenges facing this endeavor are funding and finding a facility to house the museum. Interested parties are investigating the creation of a non-profit organization to move the museum forward.



A presentation was made on cleanup efforts underway at Pleasant Point Cemetery, located just north of Magnolia Springs. This old, Black cemetery had been abandoned and was heavily overgrown. A group of concerned citizens banded together to clear the property, identify those interred at the site then clean and reset their headstones in their proper locations. Great progress has been made. Thirty-five graves have been identified so far and the work continues.



Cher Malta and Samantha Kusters, with Clay County Tourism, were kind enough to share their expertise with the group. They provided an excellent presentation on the best practices to use Instagram to promote public awareness of our activities and events. They explained the primary uses of Instagram, the best methods to construct posts to the app as well as pitfalls and practices to avoid.

The various historical groups provided updates on their activities. It was encouraging to learn of all the efforts to preserve and share Clay County's history. There are many positive actions taking place across the county. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants traveled to Palermo's Restaurant for lunch and conversation. Lunch was followed by a tour of the Clarke House for our visitors from other parts of the county. It's always good to share ideas for the common good. These ideas can lead to solutions and initiatives to better serve the residents of Clay County and our visitors.

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.



Moonlight on Magnolia



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. Students, 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:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Word Limit</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Cash Prize</u>
4 th - 6th	300 - 500	<i>What is Veterans Day?</i>	\$50
7th – 8th	400 - 700	<i>Why is Veteran's Day Necessary?</i>	\$75
9th – 12th	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.

Veterans' Corner: Robert Lee Webb

Magnolia Cemetery is home to 255 veterans as of July 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.

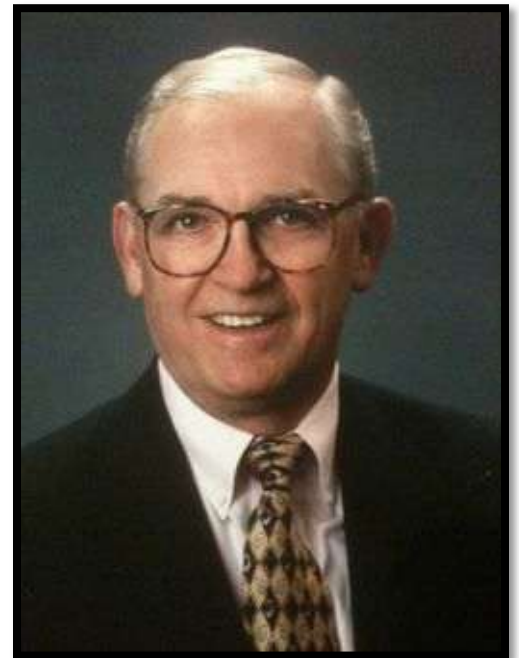
This month we are honoring Robert Lee Webb.

Robert was born in Topeka, Kansas in 1926 to Floyd and Laura Webb. Robert began his military career in November of 1944 entering the United States Navy. He served on an amphibious warfare ship until he transitioned to the Naval Reserves in August of 1946.

In 1948 he was still in the Naval Reserves when, in accordance with the Selective Service Act of 1948, he registered for the draft listing his status as a chemistry student at Washburn University. He would graduate from Washburn with his degree in chemistry and move to Jacksonville, Florida.

In 1950 Robert was a lodger in the home of William and Anna Gard. He was employed as a chemist for the Glidden Company in Jacksonville. Also lodging with the Gard's was Mary Elizabeth White who had moved to Jacksonville to work for Independent Life Insurance Co.

During Robert's employment at Glidden, he developed a process to transform turpentine from pine trees into flavors and fragrances.



Robert Lee Webb



Glidden Company Chemical Plant in Jacksonville. (1960)

His work is now used to flavor toothpaste, mouthwash, vitamin pills and candies and to create scents for perfumes, soaps and detergents.

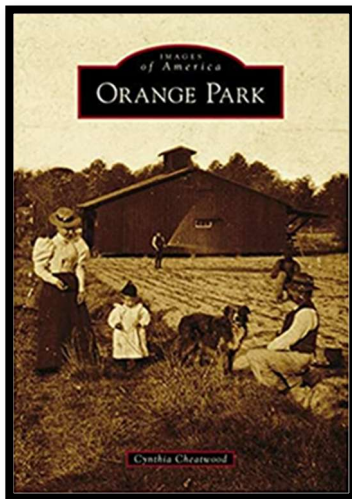
Robert and Mary Elizabeth married in 1952, had 2 children and moved to Orange Park in 1969. Robert later worked for Union Camp Corp. and a British chemical company in London before forming his own consulting firm in 1987.

Robert passed in 2002 in Orange Park and beloved wife Mary Elizabeth in 2007.

Today when we wake up and brush our teeth, we can thank Robert Lee Webb for the enjoyable flavors we experience.

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, August 10 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.



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.



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](#)

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