



The Historical Society of Orange Park

February 2026 Newsletter

We are already one month into the new year and February is upon us! This month, we celebrate Black History Month. We have two events scheduled to highlight Black history in Orange Park. First, on February 7, you are welcome to join Betty Demmons and other long-time Orange Parkers as they share stories of their family's time in our town. This is a rare opportunity to hear the memories of by-gone decades of Orange Park history. On February 28, the Society will guide visitors in a walk through African American history for our second annual Black History Walks through Magnolia Cemetery. More information about these events is shown below.

Also, February 18 marks the 149th anniversary of the establishment of Orange Park, Florida by the Florida Winter Home and Improvement Company. The town, which occupies part of the former Laurel Grove Plantation, was envisioned by its founders as a southern refuge and citrus farming community for Northerners. While the town has grown significantly over the years, the original layout has not changed. The next time you drive along Gano Avenue, Blake Street or Loring Avenue, remember the men whose vision created the town we enjoy today.



The new year also means that it is time to renew your membership. If you have not yet done so, we invite you to renew your membership either by mail, using the attached renewal form, or online via our website, www.ophistory.org/store.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
February 7, 2026	11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Black History Presentation	TC Miller Center
February 8, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
February 28, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Black History Cemetery Tours	Magnolia Cemetery
March 8, 2026	2:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Carrie Clarke Day	Clarke House
April 12, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Black History Month Events**TC Miller and Orange Park's African American Story**

Feb. 7th is the birthday of Theresa Miller for whom the TC Miller is named! Starting at 11 AM at the TC Miller Center, Betty Demmon, long-time member of the Society will welcome various speakers to share stories of the town's notable African American families. Cynthia Cheatwood will share Theresa Miller's story, sharing the local educator's long family history in Clay County and the example of perseverance she represents. Members of the Walker, McDowers, Fillmore, Floyd and other families will give a never-before-gathered picture of the community of African American families that dates back to the very beginning of Orange Park's town story. Light refreshments will be served at the conclusion, in honor of what would have been Theresa Miller's 116th birthday. The historic TC Miller Center is located at 440 McIntosh Ave, Orange Park, FL. There is no cost or preregistration required. Come join this very special conversation!

Black History Walks through Magnolia Cemetery

Please join us on February 28, 2026, between 2 :00 PM and 4:00 PM at 1040 Kingsley Ave. in Orange Park's beautiful Magnolia Cemetery to take a stroll through Orange Park's Black history. Special tours will begin at 2 PM and take about an hour. New tours will form as folks arrive, until the last tour starts at 3:30 PM. Learn about folks from Orange Park's past who helped create the town we have today. There is no admission fee; no registration is required. The Magnolia stories will be different from those presented at the TC Miller Center, but most of them will also be shared by family members.

**Little Library to be Dedicated at Orange Park Woman's Club**

On Thursday, February 5, 2026, a new "Little Library" will be installed at the Woman's Club, 130 Kingsley Ave. in Orange Park. A short program will be offered at 1 PM, and the public is invited to be on hand. Mr. Ken Eberlein has built the little library, donating his time. At 85-years of age, he is an inspiration. Materials were donated by Lowe's and Home Depot made a cash donation as well. Come join your neighbors for this charming community recognition.

Save the Date- March 8th Carrie Clarke Day

Each year the Society remembers Carrie Clarke for the contributions she made to Orange Park's community. This year we will have live music, performed by Eugene Nix, Wanda Dillaberry and Steve Ferguson on the front lawn. Historical displays will be presented, free guided tours of the Clarke House will be conducted, books will be available for sale and more. The activities will begin at 2 pm and conclude at 5 pm. Come learn about this amazing Orange Park citizen and enjoy the charm of her home, made especially charming with the addition of fresh arrangements throughout. Follow our Facebook page for more at Miss Carrie.

Save Another Date- May 7, 2026- Members Tea Party

As a perk of membership, the Society is hosting a tea party for its members. Starting at 10 AM on Thursday, May 7th, members will enjoy tea and conversation with a few games along the way. An RSVP will be sent to the membership in April. This event was a big hit last year and we hope it will be even better this year!

Arbor Day Celebration

The Town of Orange Park hosted an Arbor Day Celebration on January 16. A tree was planted in memory of long-time Orange Park resident and Society member, Kenny Radwanski. Kenny had an extremely outgoing personality and seemingly knew everyone in town. The community turned out to honor their old friend as a tree was planted near his former home on Azalea Avenue. It was a fitting way to commemorate Kenny and his contributions to our community.



Quarterly Member Meeting Recap

On January 20, the Society conducted its first Quarterly Member Meeting of the year. The featured speaker at this meeting was Sandra DiGiovanni. Sandra shared stories about several historic homes in Orange Park and those who lived there.

Featured in her presentation were the Helffrich House, one of the oldest homes in Orange Park, built in 1882. Located on Plainfield Avenue, this house served as a home for local entrepreneur, Stanley Morgan, and his wife Nellie, and later as the home of the beloved dance instructor, Trudy Sigman.

Next on the program was early Orange Park home, the Lynch House on Kingsley Avenue. This house has known many owners, most notably sisters, Elsie Bakewell and Ruth Lynch. Ruth's children still own the house.



Sandra next shared information about the large house at the east end of Milwaukee Avenue. The house, built in 1928, served as the home for a dentist, a doctor, a car salesman and recently, as the home of Louis and Mary Huntley, long-time Orange Park residents and founders of a chain of convenience stores.

The next homes featured were two houses on McIntosh Avenue built in the early 1940's. These houses served as the homes of the Weston and Walker families. Wilhemina Weston and Freddie Walker were siblings as well as neighbors. The two families were remarkably close and cared for each other. Freddie Walker worked hard and served his community as a Scout leader and President of the local NAACP.

The final topic of the tour of homes was Via Tisdelle. Via Tisdelle is named for Achille Carlyle Tisdelle, a World War Two veteran who served in the Philippines. Col. Tisdelle survived the Bataan Death March and was a prisoner of war in Japan. After the war, Col. Tisdelle married Margot Massee and they moved to Mira Rio, now known as Club Continental. Col. Tisdelle built six houses on the street that bears his name in the early 1950's. The homes were rented to various individuals until 1970, when the homes were purchased by CJ Massee, who sold them over the next two years. This brief overview illustrates a small portion of the role of these historic homes and the legacy of the families that built them and shared their story.



Helffrich House



Lynch House

2026 Earl Harrington Award for Community Service - John Shipley

The Earl Harrington Award for Community Service is awarded each year to an individual that exemplifies the community spirit of Earl Harrington, life-long resident of Orange Park who served on the Town Council, including five terms as mayor, and was a founding member of our Historical Society. At our Quarterly Meeting on January 20, we were privileged to present this year's award to Mr. John Shipley, owner of Jacksonville Memory Gardens.

John has partnered with the Society on many occasions through the years. During the construction of the Veterans Memorial, John and his staff helped to relocate existing



monuments and install new monuments as well as provide monuments and medallions for the new memorial at cost. When maintenance was needed at the memorial due to weather and/or damage, John helped us to effect repairs promptly. Last year, when the Society learned that a proper headstone for Orange Park's Ice Man, Lawrence Hicks, was lacking, John once again stepped up to provide and install a headstone for Mr. Hicks. In his spare time, John also serves as a coach for youth sports. We are most grateful to John for his service to our community and his help to our Society in our efforts to honor our veterans and deserving members of our community. We are proud to present him with this year's Earl Harrington Award for Community Service.

Orange Park Memories

The Historical Society is highlighting Orange Park's historic houses each month of 2026. This month we feature the Joseph Green House, established in 1893.

Joseph N. Green was born into slavery in 1861 in Mississippi, where he learned to build. In 1886 he made his way to Orange Park. The town, incorporated in 1877, still had pre-war buildings. When the 25-year-old Green arrived, the African American community of Orange Park clustered around McIntosh and Smith Streets, anchored by the St. James AME Church and the St. Johns Missionary Baptist Church. The area is said to have been workers quarters, stretching back to days of the old Howard Turpentine camp. Green's carpentry and building skill helped him develop the area into a self-sustaining community. He built a store, a school, a church, a meeting hall for Lodge 151 F&M and Duval Lodge 14 in addition to several residences, including this one, his own home in 1893.

This home was over 1200 square feet with three bedrooms, living room, dining room and kitchen. There were large porches on both floors to make summers tolerable. The upstairs porch was screened for that purpose. Striking elements included the ornate turned newel posts on both levels and seldom-seen bay windows on the living room and bedroom.

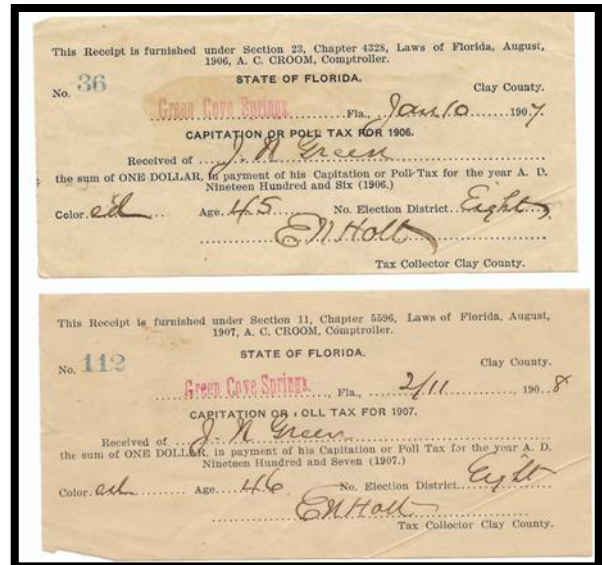
The Greens raised six children in the house. When Joseph died in 1928, he was buried in Magnolia Cemetery. Over time his headstone sank into the sandy soil there. It was raised by members of the Historical Society just a year.

Annie Green took in laundry and housed female boarders to pay the bills. She added a bathroom to the house in 1935, replacing the privy used since 1893. After Annie's death in 1952, the house was rented out but stayed in the Green family for 40 years.

The family home was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 with the help of a founding member of the Historical Society of Orange Park, Mary Ann Study. Annie's will left the house to the St. James AME Church to be used as a rental property but it was torn down in 1999 when the church said it was too far gone to save. It may be gone, but it, and the family's role in Orange Park history, should not be forgotten. Join the Society for Black History historical tours through Magnolia Cemetery Feb. 28th between 2 and 4 PM for more of this history.



Joseph Green House



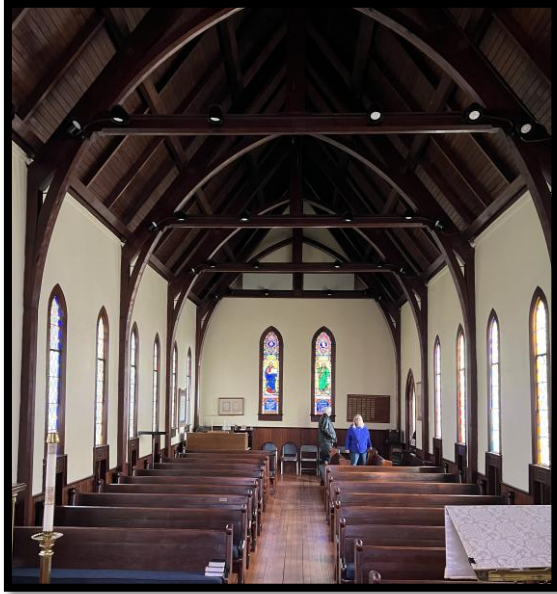
Joseph Green Poll Tax Receipt



Green House Staircase

Clay County Historical Roundtable

On Monday January 12, representatives from various historical groups in Clay County met at S. Mary's Episcopal Church in Green Cove Springs for our semi-annual roundtable discussion. The day's activities began with a tour of the historic St. Mary's church, which was built in the late 1870's in the Carpenter-Gothic style. The tour was led by Pat Garlinghouse, a member of the Clay County Historical Society and St. Mary's church. The church featured narrow windows framed with Gothic arches and movable panels to allow cross-ventilation from breezes off the adjacent St. Johns River. The inside of the church was beautiful. It was easy to see that it has been cared for over the last 150 years.



The Roundtable was held in the adjacent Fellowship Hall. The Clay County Historical Society, Historical Society of Penney Farms, Clay County Archives, Keystone Heights Heritage Commission, Middleburg Museum, African American Historical Society of Clay County and the Historical Society of Orange Park were represented as was the Clay County Tourism Department. Attendees were treated to two excellent presentations on the use of social media. Bree McGhee provided information on the use of Instagram to create reels, short videos that can be used to highlight assorted topics related to local history. Teresa Moore next shared how Facebook can be used to enhance interaction with the public and maximize the distribution of information. Both mediums can be used together to share information and promote events. Teddy Meyer, with the Clay County Tourism Department, provided updates on the new Bartram Trail that is being developed in Clay County along with the features of the Explore Clay website that are available to the public. Representatives from the various historical societies provided updates on their activities and shared information with those present.



After the Roundtable, several attendees adjourned to the Corner Pocket on Magnolia Street for lunch and lively conversation. The Corner Pocket was a gracious and friendly host. The semi-annual roundtables are a wonderful way to share information and strengthen connections between our various groups.

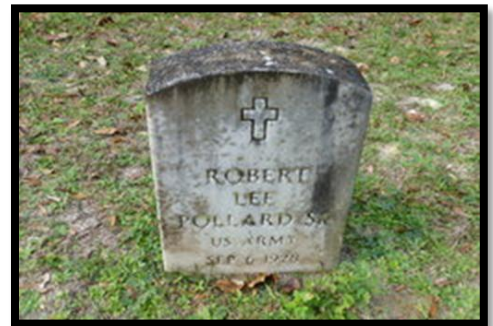
Veterans' Corner – African American Service Members

February 1st brings the start of Black History Month. It is a time to honor and recognize the contributions and history of African Americans. The precursor to Black History Month was Negro History Week created in 1926. The second week in February was chosen because the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln on the 12th and Frederick Douglass on the 14th were celebrated in the Black communities.

What better way to recognize the contributions made by our African Americans citizens than to honor those that served in the military, particularly families.

Let's start with the Pollard family.

Robert Lee Pollard Sr. served in the US Army from 1946 until 1954. His commitment to serving his country was passed on to three of his sons.



Robert Lee Pollard Jr. served in the U.S. Navy as an Aviation Electrician and earned the National Defense Medal. He was honorably discharged in 1979.



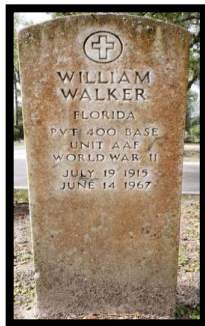
Johannes Pollard was a communication specialist in the U.S. Army serving in the Persian Gulf.



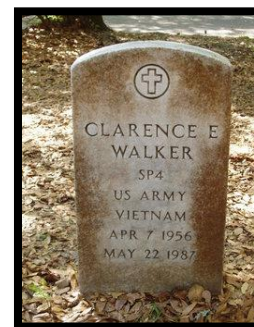
Finally, Terry Pollard served for 20 years in the US Air Force from 1976 until 1996.



Next, we honor the Walker family. Two brothers, William & Freddie, joined the service during WWII. William joined at Camp Blanding and served with the 400th Army Air Force from 1941 through 1945. His brother Freddie Walker Sr. served in the US Navy.



Following in the family tradition, two of Freddie Walker Sr.'s sons served in the military. Clarence Walker served two tours of duty in Viet Nam in 1975 and then again in 1977. His brother Michael, still living in Orange Park and Freddie's youngest child, served 20 years in the US Navy.



This commitment to service to our country does not go unnoticed. ***“THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE”***

HSOP Offers Scholarship Opportunity for Orange Park High School Students



In recent months, the board has been working out the details of a \$1000 scholarship to be offered to eligible seniors at Orange Park High School. The group felt it important to give back to the community and to help a deserving senior as they prepare for college. Prospective applicants must be preparing to enter either a four- or two-year college or career/technical school. Other criteria are: 3.0 GPA, must be representing the school in a respectful manner, be a member of at

least one community service organization, and write an essay on the topic – *How has history and community service shaped you as a person and prepared you for the future?* Our gratitude and thanks go out to Dairy Queen and Boger's Shoes for their contributions which helped fund the scholarship! Once the scholarship is awarded, we will publish the winner's information in the newsletter.

Please consider assisting in funding next year's scholarship or connecting us with a business that may be willing to be a sponsor.

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.

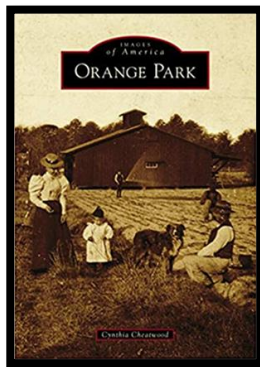


Look For Us Online

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.



Clarke House Tours

Please join us Sunday, February 8, 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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P.O. Box 08
Orange Park, FL 32067

2026 Membership Enrollment Form

☐ Member Renewal

☐ New Member

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number</u>		<u>Dues</u>	<u>Total</u>
Individual	_____	X	\$20	_____
Family	_____	X	\$35	_____
Senior (65 and over)	_____	X	\$10	_____
Student	_____	X	\$10	_____
Washington Gano Benedict Founders Level			\$100	_____
TC Miller Level Annual Membership			\$250	_____
Orange Park Normal & Industrial School Level			\$500	_____
Carrie Clarke Level (3 years)			\$1,000	_____
Additional Donation				_____
Total				_____

Dues can be paid either in person at the monthly meetings, online via our website, <https://ophistory.org/store>, or by mail. Please make checks payable to the Historical Society of Orange Park and send to:

Historical Society of Orange Park
P.O. Box 08
Orange Park, FL 32067

We appreciate your support!