



The Historical Society of Orange Park

April 2022 Newsletter

Welcome April! The pace of activities is increasing. After two years of limited events, we are happy to be out and about and enjoying the great outdoors. We recently hosted a successful Carrie Clarke Day. Now the Clay County Fair is here and Kids Fest will be here before the month of April is gone. Find something of interest and have a good time.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
April 10, 2022	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
April 23-24, 2022	10:00 AM – 4:00 PM	Kids' Fest	Town Hall Park
May 8, 2022	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
May 9, 2022	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	General Meeting	Orange Park Library
June 12, 2022	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Additional information on these events can be found below.

Clay County Fair

The Clay County Fair is back!! The Fairgrounds are located on SR 16, a few miles west of Green Cove Springs. This year, the Fair runs through Saturday, April 9. Everyone enjoys the thrills of the Midway, the sights and sounds of the livestock exhibits, the interesting crafts and exhibits and the food (we can't forget the food). Visitors to the fair also enjoy stopping by the Early Florida Village ([Early Florida Village \(claycountyfair.org\)](http://claycountyfair.org)). The unique collection of buildings and exhibits provide a glimpse of life in early Florida. One of the favorite sites to visit is the One-Room Schoolhouse. In honor of the return of the fair and the Early Florida Village, we thought it appropriate to reprint an article that first ran in 2014. It was written by HSOP President Cindy Cheatwood and our dear friend, Virginia Hash, who had a passion for rural schoolhouses. We hope you enjoy it.



Getting Schooled at the Fair

By Virginia Hash and Cindy Cheatwood

The Penny Farms “one-room schoolhouse” awaits its visitors. For two weeks in April, it will welcome thousands, inviting them to take a lesson from the past. A barn-like structure built in the late 1940s or early 1950s, it was created to alleviate overcrowding at the town’s original school. Hundreds of young children ran through its doors. How many songs echoed that chamber? How many ABCs flowed on the breeze from its open window?



The simple building housed 1st and 2nd grades, and was attached to the rear of the existing school by a covered wooden walkway. In the 1940s, the activation of Camp Blanding and the new Naval Base in Green Cove Springs caused student population in Penney Farms to boom, so an additional 1st and 2nd grade structure became necessary. This building was moved to the Clay County Agricultural Fairgrounds so that visitors can be transported back in time to an earlier day in Clay.

Visitors to the schoolhouse today will find an exhibit of items given by Ann Williamson who, beginning in 1953 attended the school in first and second grade. The dress displayed there is one Ann’s mother made for her to wear on her first day of first grade. Her desk was along the wall with the windows where she could look outside at a row of bamboo that buffered the back door of the Penny Farms Post Office and Sauder’s Grocery to the east one the corner several yards away. Classmates came from the Town of Penny Farms, Belmore/McRae, Kingsley Lake and Camp Blanding.

Many of the children had fathers who worked for Foremost Dairies which had two locations at the time. These dairies were part of the Reinhold/Shadowland Farms. Some of the other students were from families who were stationed at Camp Blanding or the nearby naval base in Green Cove Springs. Ann was quite at home in Penny Farms as her mother was born and raised there. Her grandfather had come to Penny Farms in 1926 from Nebraska and was part of the J. C. Penny Experimental Farms project.



The teacher for the first three grades was Mrs. Elmer Riggs. Each morning she rang the school bell for the start and end of the school day. Beside reading, writing and arithmetic, activities included raising the flag each morning with prayer, patriotic songs in assembly, and visits from various missionaries from Penny Retirement Center. During the day, each grade was called up to the front of the room and sat with the teacher in a semicircle as she taught using the blackboard or flannel AMC flashcards. When students misbehaved they were ordered to stand in the corner with their back to the rest of the class.

Recess time was set aside in the late morning or early afternoon and included outdoor play on swings and monkey bars. Lunch might be brought from home or eaten in a cafeteria, a separate building between this building and the one for the older students, built in the 1920s. After lunch, Ms. Williamson remembers that students to a 30-minute nap on rag rugs brought from home. Restrooms were located in the back of the original school.

In addition to Mrs. Williamson's donations there are many books, some dating back to the 1800s inside the old school. There are posters depicting one-room schools from various parts of Clay County and the nation at large. Visitors will also find a large wall map that depicts the early settlements and schools in Clay County. As the docent shows them around they will have a chance to pick up brochures from the various historical groups housed within Clay County and hopefully many will be inspired to check out the rich history of the county.

The Penny Farms school house represents the many rural neighborhood schools that grew up with the county starting in 1869 when Ozias Budington became the county's first official Superintendent of Schools. He oversaw the creation of Clay's first school in Middleburg. By 1900 there were 52 schools here and teachers were still earning the \$25 per month salary begun in 1869. Today there are almost 5000 employees in the Clay County School District, in 43 schools, with a student population of 35,000.

As you visit the fair this year, be sure to stop by and walk the floors of history. Examine the artifacts and items on the walls but also take a moment to appreciate the times those walls have witnessed. How many giggles? How many tears? How many memories abide within that space? Just maybe the spirit of childhood waits for you there.

Kids Fest Has Moved to April!

The Society will once again participate in Kids Fest with the Town of Orange Park. We will be sharing old photos and artifacts from Orange Park's past with the newer generation. Because we are "fans" of Orange Park, we will also assist students in creating accordion-style orange-shaped fans to enjoy during the event.



Volunteers are needed to help at our booth! Hours are 10 AM - 4PM both Saturday, April 23rd and Sunday, April 24th. We will set up the booth at 9 AM each morning and start closing it down at about 3:45 each afternoon. We would appreciate two volunteers at a time in 2-3 shifts per day. You don't have to be crafty and the historical points will be written out for you to share.

This is a good venue for us to expose people to the Society. *The Images of America: Orange Park* book will be sold and membership information will be available. Every time we have a booth like this we meet new people who want to tell us their OP history stories. Lots of good connections have been made.

If you would like to help, please contact Cindy (904.707.0822) at ckcheatwood@hotmail.com or Van at info@ophistory.org.

General Meeting - Harriet Beecher Stowe's Visit to Laurel Grove

In late winter 1866, the world-famous author, Harriett Beecher Stowe, disembarked from a sailboat and walked ashore at Laurel Grove Plantation, the future site of the Town of Orange Park. Mrs. Stowe wrote of her visit to the area, sharing her observations about the condition of the old plantation, the state of the people that lived and worked there and her reflections on a local area resident. Mrs. Stowe's words capture some of the societal changes of the times and how people were adapting as the pace of change increased. Please join us at 5:30 PM, May 9, at the Orange Park Library for a discussion of Mrs.



Stowe's visit to Laurel Grove, learn more about her life, why she came to Laurel Grove and how it affected not only her future but the future of Florida.

Carrie Clarke Day

On Sunday, March 13, after a two-year absence, Carrie Clarke Day returned to Clarke House Park. The weather was beautiful and it was a good day to be outside. This year's event was more low-key than previous events but it was well-suited for the day and blended well with other activities in the park. The Society hosted tours of the Clarke House and shared this history of the house and Clarke family with all visitors. The Society of was joined by members of the Art Guild of Orange Park and the Garden Club of Orange Park. These groups hosted a joint children's activity. The Art Guild invited children to decorate a flowerpot. Once the flowerpot was decorated, the

Garden Club helped the children place soil and plant a flower in it, leaving them with a nice memento of the day and giving them the opportunity to help something grow. Society member, Melanie Tharp, hosted a booth that gave visitors a chance to vote on the age-old debate on the correct pronunciation of “pecan”. You can read about the outcome of the vote elsewhere in this newsletter.

We offer our sincere thanks to the Garden Club for replanting the flower bed in front of the Clarke House. Winter had taken its toll on the plantings there and it now looks great. Thanks also to the Arrangers Guild of the Garden Club for providing several beautiful flower arrangements to decorate the Clarke House. They made the house feel much more like home. Finally, thanks to the Town of Orange Park for providing police officers to assist pedestrians crossing Kingsley Avenue to and from Clarke House Park.





The Great Divide

By Melanie Tharp

Carrie Clarke Day is an annual celebration to honor the Clarkes, who in their lifetime contributed so much of their selves and resources to their beloved Town of Orange Park and its residents. The Historical Society of Orange Park research members are continually searching and learning more bits & pieces about the Clarkes' life here in Orange Park. One of the bits learned is that in its heyday years of a working farm, not a park, Mr. Clarke was a very successful pecan grower. His trees produced enough pecans along with his business savvy to establish CLARKE'S PECAN GROVE and the nuts were shipped to local and out of state markets throughout the 1940's.

Every year the HSOP endeavors to bring old favorites and new ideas for activities to folks who come to celebrate the day with us. Just a few years ago, members discovered the rusting remnant of one of the original CLARKE'S PECAN GROVE signs, which is now proudly hung for display at various events and which also inspired the idea for a contest as an activity for this year's Carrie Clarke Day. But before I continue, let me tell you some of what my research revealed about the humble pecan.



It's the only native nut to the United States and North America is the only place that the trees are indigenous. The Archeological evidence suggests that the Pecan Tree originated in what is now South Texas and Northern Mexico near rivers and creeks at least 8,000 years ago. The first recorded description of the nut was written in 1533 by a shipwrecked Spaniard.

This nut was a staple in the American Indian diet during the fall and winter months. They ate, bartered and traded them with other nomadic tribes, which led to the spread of the native wild trees across the Southeast and the Mississippi River Valley. In 1846, the first grafting experiments were done at Oak Alley Plantation near New Orleans by the slave gardener, named Antoine. The successful species was given the name "Centennial" at the 1876 World's Fair in Philadelphia. Union soldiers carried the nuts home to their families, which helped them gain popularity in the northern states.

Pecans have been shipped throughout the world since around 1802. They are now grown in Australia, South Africa, Brazil, and Israel but by far the state of Georgia still grows the most and with proper care and protection these trees will live a long life. Georgia has trees well over into their 100's still producing edible pecans.

The word pecan comes from the Algonquin word Paccane (various spellings), which means "too hard to crack by hand". Thank goodness for today's Paper Shells! The Indians introduced the nut to the early explorers; the Spanish called them "Pa Can O" while the French called them "PE Cane". In 1775 Thomas Jefferson carried seedlings from the Mississippi Valley to Virginia and gave plantings to George Washington at Mount Vernon. Jefferson was fond of eating the nuts and he called them "Poc Cons".

Hence the idea for a contest, "Puh- KAHN Vs. PEE- Can"! How do you pronounce pecan? So those who attended Carrie Clark Day or played in the park whether man, woman or child voted by placing a pecan in the designated CLARKE'S PECAN GROVE sacks at our booth.



The phonetic truth about how to pronounce the word is as sticky as the syrup used in our pie recipes. Many theories have emerged over the years and the divide over how we say the word can drive you nuts.

The main theory says the division is the Mason-Dixon Line, however a poll conducted by the National Pecan Shellers Association asked Americans how they said pecan and nearly 70% of those living in the Northeast say Pee-can, but wait ... 45% of Southerners do too. Another theory even relates it to a person's class and education. I don't

know about you but I would be very angry if I was told I fell on the dumb end of the spectrum because of the way I say pecan. I could easily point out what might be considered even dumber is that there's a little thing we call a "peanut" and it's not even a real nut!

Is it Gender? Many husbands and wives pronounce it the opposite of each other, but just as many say it the same. Could it urban versus rural? That also proves to hold no bearing on how people say the word. Maybe it's political? Red States versus Blue States, surely we can't trust that either. Some say it's just a dialect thing, tomatoes,-tomotoes... potatoes-patotoes.

After tallying the pecans in our sacks at the end of the day the official count of our voters was:

44% said the word PEE-can	56% said the word Puh-KAHN.
61 out of 139	78 out of 139

I think most of us are all smart enough to know there is no wrong or right answer here. Most likely we learned to pronounce this word the way we heard it as a child, from whomever or wherever we lived. If we should vote again next year the results could easily change.

As for me, my formative years were spent in a part of Texas where it was "correctly" pronounced Puh-KAHN. A PEE-can was something our great grandparents kept under the bed at night so they didn't have to brave the weather going to the Outhouse. Maybe I could show some diplomacy and learn to say them both, "Honey, you'll have to crack some Puh-KAHNs before I can make that PEE-can pie."

Probably not.

Thank You Boy Scout Troop 653!

The "Green House" cottage behind the Clarke House is getting some much-needed attention! Paul Heffner, an Eagle Scout candidate from Boy Scout Troop 653 is coordinating efforts to add hand rails and landscaping to the front of the the structure. On Saturday, March 26th he and several scouts and volunteers removed the damaged screens and hundreds of rusting staples and small nails. The added a strong hand rail on each side of the porch entry using pressure-treated wood that will be painted in a couple of weeks. They cleaned around the grounds before planting small shrubs and flowers. After mulch was laid they pressure washed the steps and concrete areas. Two boys valiantly shook all the dirt out of the porch covering so that it looks brand new! What a difference they have made!

The 1925 cottage is the last remaining housing used when Clarke Park was Clarke's Pecan Grove, a large operation sending pecans around the world! The understory of the cottage is lined in concrete as part of the pecan aging process of the time. Efforts are underway to further preserve the structure so that it might continue to tell the story of old Orange Park and be an asset to the community, something to be shared with non-profit groups in the town.

So, the next time you visit the park, check out the fine work of Paul, his troop and volunteers!



Orange Park Woman's Club

The Orange Park Woman's Club has note cards for sale to benefit the children of W.E. Cherry and Grove Park Elementary Schools. President Kay Earhart will be giving one book to each teacher in each grade to add to the children's classroom libraries. This is the President's Choice fundraiser. The notecards are \$14 for a dozen cards and envelopes and are printed on fine linen. Contact Linda Fonferek at 803-4599 to order.

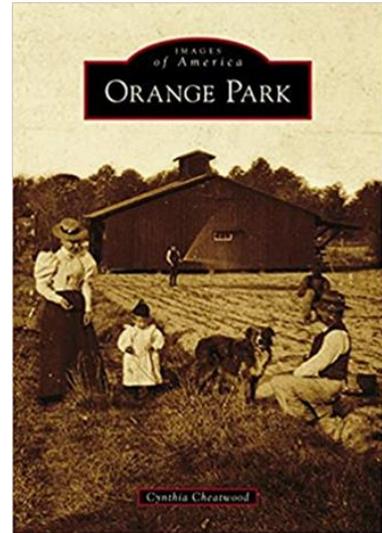


Images of America - Orange Park

Would you like to learn more about the history of Orange Park? If so, please consider purchasing a copy of Images of America – Orange Park. This book, written by Society President, Cynthia Cheatwood, shares the history of our town through archival photographs and stories collected from a variety of sources.

The Historical Society of Orange Park has copies for sale. Copies can be purchased through the Society for \$20 each (\$15 each for Society members). *This book is also available on Amazon, Barnes and Noble or various other outlets online.*

For more information, please email us at info@ophistory.org. All author royalties for the sale of this book will go toward historical preservation in Orange Park.



Clarke House Tours



The Clarke House is open for tours on the second Sunday of each month. This month, the house will be open Sunday, April 10 from 2 PM to 4 PM. If you have not yet visited the house or, if it has just been a while, we invite you to stop by to look around. The slower pace of a Sunday afternoon provides an opportunity to tour the entire house, both upstairs and down. We hope to see you there.

Look For Us on Facebook

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park the next time you visit Facebook. Check our page for updates on society activities and updates on the Veterans Memorial. Don't forget to click "Like" on our page.

