



The Historical Society of Orange Park

December 2021 Newsletter

We trust that everyone had a good November and happy Thanksgiving. It is always good to take a step back, reflect on our many blessings and be grateful for each and every one of them, whether times are good or difficult.

December is upon us and that usually means a busy month as we prepare for Christmas. While December is a busy month, it is primarily, a time of joy and celebration. We hope you all will have multiple occasions to share the joys of the season with friends and family.

The Society will be decorating the Clarke House this Saturday morning, December 4, in preparation for Hometown Holiday and our holiday gathering on the evening of December 13. Hometown Holiday is a nice family event and our gathering on the 13th will provide members of our Society an opportunity to come together as a group for the first time in many months.

Historical Society of Orange Park Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
December 10-11, 2021	5 PM – 9 PM	Hometown Holiday	Clarke House Park
December 13, 2021	6 PM – 8 PM	Holiday Celebration and General Meeting	Clarke House

Additional information on these events can be found below.

Hometown Holiday

This month, from 5 PM to 9 PM on Friday, December 10 and Saturday, December 11, the Town of Orange Park will host the 9th annual Hometown Holiday Event at Clarke House Park. The Clarke House will be decorated for the holidays and open to the public. There will be plenty of holiday activity in the park as well. In addition to tours of the Clarke House, visitors can enjoy classic holiday movies on the outdoor big screen, live musical entertainment, visits with Santa, shopping in the Christmas village, food vendors, and a magical lighted trail ride through the forest! This is a fun family event and a great way to add to the Christmas season.

Volunteers to meet and guide visitors through the Clarke House are needed. Please let us know if you are able to help either Friday or Saturday evening. You can contact us at info@ophistory.org.



Hometown Holiday 2020

Christmas Gathering

On the evening of December 13th at 6 PM, there will be a Christmas Gathering and General Meeting of the Historical Society. This meeting is open to members and friends of the Society as well as those interested in joining the Society. While we have hosted several events over the last two years, this will be our first meeting in some time, and we look forward to seeing everyone. Come join us for music, news and fellowship as we celebrate the season and a return to normalcy.



Bring a dessert to share with others if you are able.

Veterans Day Ceremony 2021

Thanks to all your prayers, the rain held off for our annual Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial in Orange Park. It rained lightly until just before the ceremony began at 11am with the Welcome and Opening Remarks by Van Hogan. We were fortunate to have the support of the American Legion Post 250 Riders and the Patriot Guard who have been with us for every ceremony since the groundbreaking for the Veterans Memorial 10 years ago. We are also grateful

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for the Arrangers Guild and the Hummingbird Circle for their extraordinary efforts in beautification and the creation of the wreath for the ceremony.

The Orange Park High School JROTC Color Guard was crisp and precise as they presented the colors while the "National Anthem" was sung by Peyton Tison, a student from Fleming Island High School who delivered an awesome and inspiring performance. The First Coast Highlanders played to perfection and had everyone in the audience on the verge of tears with their playing of "Amazing Grace."

We were also fortunate for the clear skies allowing a flyover of seven aircraft from the Dreamland Squadron based at Haller Field in Green Cove Springs. The audience enjoyed excellent guest speakers including Barbara Voi, Regent of the Sophia Fleming Chapter of the DAR, who described the history and importance of the new Tomb of the Unknown Soldier 100th Anniversary Memorial Plaque which is adjacent to the Blue Star and Veterans Memorials. CDR Christopher Casne, who is currently stationed at NAS Jax, was the day's Keynote speaker and provided great insight into the importance and relevance of Veterans Day. He and Mayor Randy Anderson presented and placed the wreath at the base of the Memorial.

As always, a key part of our Veterans Day Ceremony is the reading of the winning essays submitted by the Elementary, Middle and High School students from schools throughout Clay County. This year's theme, "Why should we honor Veterans?" brought out the best of their heartfelt tributes and continues to be a special part of the program.

Our singer Peyton Tison helped to close the ceremony with an absolutely rousing rendition of "God Bless the USA". At the conclusion of the ceremony, Cindy Cheatwood invited all participants and attendees to join the Historical Society of Orange Park for light refreshments provided by the DAR and the Orange Park Woman's Club at the historic Clarke House. It was a great day!

Of course, everyone knows that great days only happen due to the weeks of effort and planning preceding the event. We would like to say a big thank you to Emily Dockery and the Town of Orange Park staff for their assistance in so many areas. The Fire and Rescue Department was there early to set up the sound system needed for the Veterans Day Ceremony. The Police Department controlled traffic and kept everyone safe crossing the ever busy Kingsley Avenue.

We also wanted to offer a special thanks to Vada Davis and the Town of Orange Park's Public Works Staff. They worked for weeks removing dead trees, landscaping the entire Memorial area, power washing the Memorial and Pavers, and assisting with the installation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier 100th Anniversary Memorial. They also installed flags along the entrance. We give our heartfelt thanks to all of you. This was indeed a community effort.

Scenes from Veterans Day 2021







Clarke House Visit

On Monday, November 29, the Society was privileged to host the Middleburg-based SDG Creative Pursuits Homeschooling Co Op for a tour of the Clarke House. The students and their parents were provided a brief history of the Clarke family and their home in Orange Park. The group then toured the house, upstairs and downstairs, at their leisure. At the conclusion of the tour, our visitors had the opportunity to look around Clark House Park and the new playground. We very much enjoyed SDG's visit to the Clarke House and hope they have other opportunities to visit and learn more about the history of Orange Park and Clay County.



SDG Creative Pursuits Homeschooling Co Op Visit to the Clarke House

Middleburg Museum

The Middleburg Museum is hosting speaker programs for the remainder of 2021. Meetings are held at 6:30 PM the first Thursday of the month at the Middleburg Civic Association, 2102 Palmetto Street.

This month's meeting features a Holiday Celebration to be held Thursday, December 2 at 6:30 PM. Light hors d'oeuvres and some sweet goodies will be provided, and everyone is welcome to bring something to share! Board Members will provide updates and copies of the Museum's newsletter will be available.



The Middleburg Museum is open Sundays from 2 PM to 4 PM. Currently, the museum is featuring a rotating display prepared by Dr. Cynthia Stone. Dr. Stone is also available to open the museum for special tours as well. She can be contacted at (904) 860-0960 to make arrangements for your group.

To learn more about the Middleburg Museum, please visit their Facebook Page ([The Middleburg Museum - Home | Facebook](#)).

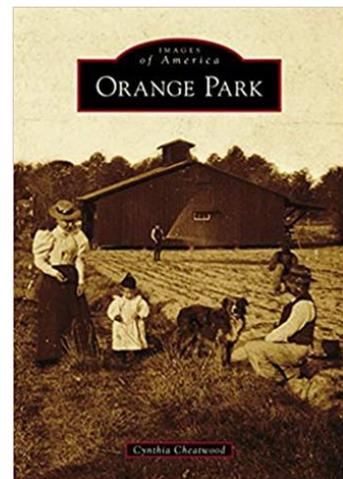
Christmas Gift Ideas

If you are searching for a Christmas gift for that unique individual on your list, we offer the following two options. Both items are unique to Orange Park and all proceeds will be used to enhance life in our community.

Images of America - Orange Park

Would you like to learn more about the history of Orange Park? If so, you should pick up 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.

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 Fonferik at 803-4599 to order.



Orange Park Elementary and Community Life

Recently, Sarah Campbell, Town Manager of Orange Park, provided us with a copy of a short article on the history of Orange Park Elementary School. The article was prepared by members of the Orange Park Woman's Club almost 50 years ago in the mid-1970's and was based primarily on recollections of people that either attended or worked at the school.

The school was built in 1927 and classes commenced in January 1928 with 4 rooms and 54 students in Grades 1-9. The school expanded in 1955 with the addition of 3 classrooms followed by the construction of a new library in 1956 and additional classrooms on the north side of Stiles Avenue in 1958. By the mid to late 1960's,



enrollment had increased to 488, which led to the addition of four additional classrooms, known

as The Quad. It was interesting to follow the growth of the school as the town grew and enrollment increased.

Of particular interest, the article described the addition of several amenities and services instituted and provided by local volunteers. One of the first groups affiliated with the school was the local PTA, which was organized by the school and the Orange Park Woman's Club in 1930. A hot lunch program for students consisting of hot soup and milk was began in 1932 by the Woman's Club. The Spencer family provided the vegetables for the soup and another local family provided the milk. The Woman's Club oversaw this program for two years until it was taken over by the PTA. During the Depression in the 1930's, the Woman's Club provided clothing and eyeglasses to students in need.

In the mid-1950's, the PTA raised funds to provide a concrete court and a jungle gym for the playground. This was followed by the addition of a 4-seat teeter-totter provided by Moosehaven. In the late 1950's, the PTA set up a health room, with first aid equipment, for students who became ill or injured at school. Later, in the early 1970's, the PTA partnered with the Clay County School Board by purchasing carpet for the cafeteria, which was installed by the School Board.

While local government provided a school building with faculty and staff, local citizens, through non-governmental affiliated organizations, took the initiative to provide the extras needed to enhance school life. From hot meals and clothing in times in need to playground equipment to a school clinic, a variety of people and organizations stepped up to solve problems. Our neighbors worked diligently to determine the best way to furnish a multitude of services with limited resources. Community groups with an interest in a particular aspect of community life are often in a much better position to effect change. They can raise money and perform the needed tasks to complete a project to enhance community life in cooperation with local government. When kept informed, local government officials are often appreciative of the help and will work with any group seeking to make improvements in community life.

The Historical Society's efforts to construct the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery provides another illustration. We approached the Town Council with our concept for the memorial. The Town graciously provided the land for the memorial in Magnolia Cemetery and the community, which included many individual donors and a number of local businesses, all joined together to fund then construct the memorial. As the memorial neared completion, the Town was able to construct the sidewalk and sitework needed to complete the project. It was a true community project.

Another example of community involvement occurred in the early 2000's when the Clarke House was slated for demolition. Local citizens banded together to save the Clarke House and from their efforts, the Clarke House was preserved and our Historical Society was created. The Clarke House still stands today as a direct link to the early days of Orange Park that is enjoyed by many visitors each year and our Society continues to share the history of Orange Park with our community.

In short, if we want to improve our communities, we need to get involved in community life. In addition to our Historical Society and our local churches, there are a number of organizations such as the Woman's Club, the Garden Club, the Lion's Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Orange Park Athletic Association, just to name a few, that do great work in our community. They can all use your time and energy to help others and improve life for everyone. We all have a role to play. Find your role and help yourself by helping others.

Clarke House Tours



Due to the Hometown Holiday event and the multiple open house opportunities it provides, there will be no open house tours on Sunday, December 12. Please join us either Friday, December 10 or Saturday, December 11 between 5 PM and 9 PM to tour the house. We will resume our regular open house tours on Sunday, January 9. Please stop by to see us and take a look at the historic Clarke House.

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.

Membership in the Historical Society of Orange Park

We are grateful for the support our members have provided over the years through membership and participation. We ask that you continue to support our mission to preserve the history of Orange Park and share that history with the community. Ask a friend to join us as well. You can visit our website, www.ophistory.org, to download a membership form there.

