



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## December 2023 Newsletter

The holiday season is in full swing as we enter the last month of the year!

As we enter December, we hope that you and your families have had a blessed year. We are grateful for the many contributions of time, energy and resources necessary to transform the mission of this society into reality. We thank each and every one that has supported and/or participated in our efforts to learn and share the history of our town with others. We hope that you all have a very, Merry Christmas!



December brings more exciting opportunities! On December 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, we will participate in the Town of Orange Park's annual Hometown Holiday in the Park. The Clarke House will be decorated for Christmas and open for visitors both evenings. The following Monday, December 11, we will host a holiday gathering for our members and friends at the Clarke House.

You can learn more about each of these events below.

### Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
December 8 & 9, 2023	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday	Clarke House Park
December 11, 2023	6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Holiday Gathering	Clarke House
December 16, 2023	12:00 PM – 1:00 PM	Wreaths Across America	Veterans Memorial
January 14, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
February 5, 2024	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library

### Hometown Holiday in the Park

Join us for the 11th annual Hometown Holiday at Clarke House Park on Friday, December 8 and Saturday, December 9. The event will run from 5 PM to 9 PM each evening. This is always a great family event with something for everyone and every age.

The Clarke House will be decorated for Christmas and open for visitors. Members of the Society will be on hand to answer questions and provide information about the Clarke family and our town's history.

Other activities will include live musical entertainment, food vendors, pictures with Santa, a Christmas village where you can shop for unique gifts, holiday movies on a large, outdoor screen and trail rides through the trees on a trail decorated with holiday lights.



This old-fashioned holiday celebration is a great way for your family to start the Christmas season!



Parking is available across the street from Clarke House Park at the First Baptist Church of Orange Park. Orange Park Police Officers will be on-site to help everyone safely cross Kingsley Ave. Limited handicap parking is available within the park.

We will again be collecting non-perishable food items to donate to those in need this holiday season. Food items will be collected at the Clarke House. All donations will be delivered to the Clothes Closet for distribution in the Orange Park area.

### **HSOP Holiday Gathering**

On the evening of December 11<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM, there will be a Christmas Gathering and General Meeting of the Historical Society at the Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Avenue in Clarke House Park. This meeting is open to members and friends of the Society as well as those interested in joining the Society. We look forward to seeing everyone. Come join us for music, news and fellowship as we celebrate the season and share good times. We will be collecting non-perishable food items to donate to those in need this holiday season. All donations will be delivered to the Clothes Closet for distribution in the Orange Park area.



\*Please bring a dessert to share with others if you are able.\*

### **Wreaths Across America**

The Wreaths Across America program began in humble circumstances. In 1992, the Worcester Wreath Company of Harington, Maine, made the decision to place their surplus Christmas wreaths on the graves of veterans in Arlington National Cemetery to remember them and honor their service. Word of their generosity spread and volunteers lined up to help. Over the years, the program continued to grow. In 2007, Wreaths Across America was started to better incorporate the generosity of donors and volunteers. Last year, the Wreaths Across America program placed over 2.7 million wreaths at 3,702 locations. Again this year, Magnolia Cemetery and Moosehaven Cemetery in Orange Park will be participating in the National Wreaths Across America Day on December 16, 2023.

Our local ceremony will begin at noon at the Veterans Memorial in Magnolia Cemetery, 1040 Kingsley Avenue. This is a wonderful way to honor our veterans so please plan to attend. To donate, volunteer or learn more about the program, please visit the Wreaths Across America website at [www.wreathscrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathscrossamerica.org).

### **Orange Park Memories: October: 2020s**

Throughout 2023, the Historical Society of Orange Park has posted high points in the town's history, one decade each month. We are now at the final such post which brings us to the present.

- At this writing, the Town's Historic Preservation Board has created an ordinance to guide the efforts to save our history. Preservation projects are active in the town, including at Clarke House Park where the last worker's housing structure from the original 1912 pecan grove is being preserved to tell its story.
- Due to the harsh effects of Florida's sun and rain on the inscribed pavers at the Veterans Memorial, each paver has been replaced with a new, laser-etched paver to maintain the dignity of the Memorial and the appreciation we hold for our veterans.
- Remembering our history, "long-table" gatherings are being staged to bring neighbors together in fellowship on the site where President Ulysses S. Grant once visited the town.
- The newest park in town, Rob Bradley Park, is being developed into a place for recreation and reflection and will highlight the value and charm of Orange Park's history. That property was part of Laurel Grove Plantation, then it was the only sawmill in the area before becoming the site of a fish camp that employed many locals. For many years it was the home of John Nelson, WWII vet and good friend of our historical society.

This year, the Society has highlighted main events but for each of those there are dozens of stories waiting to be shared. We invite you to join us in our discovery process. For Society information, visit [www.ophistory.org](http://www.ophistory.org).





**The original Long Table at a visit by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1880**



**Modern day Long Table near the east end of Kingsley Avenue**



**Green Cottage, Clarke House Park**



**Veterans Memorial**

### **Monkeying Around at the November General Meeting**

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, at the quarterly general meeting of the Historical Society, memories were shared about the Yerkes Primate Research Laboratories that were in Orange Park from 1930 until 1965. About three dozen folks listened to the history of the “Monkey Farm”, presented by Cindy Cheatwood. Materials found in the archives of Yale and Emory Universities were discussed. These included an original water color painting of the lab as well as floor plans of the facilities showing the variety of projects that were conducted there.

At one time the Yerkes Lab was the largest of its kind in the world, spearheaded by psychobiologist Robert Yerkes, it conducted a wide variety of projects simultaneously. These included monitoring of social habits, studies of the effects of drugs on primates as well as the famous studies trying to induce human cognition on chimpanzees. The first prefrontal lobotomy was conducted at the Orange Park facility, which was originally sponsored by Yale and Harvard. The laboratory was later transferred to Emory University in Atlanta, where the work continues today as part of the National Institute of Health.

Members of the audience including Bob Halligan, Carol Hogan and Steve Makros shared personal memories about the “Monkey Farm” adding a charming nostalgia to the evening.

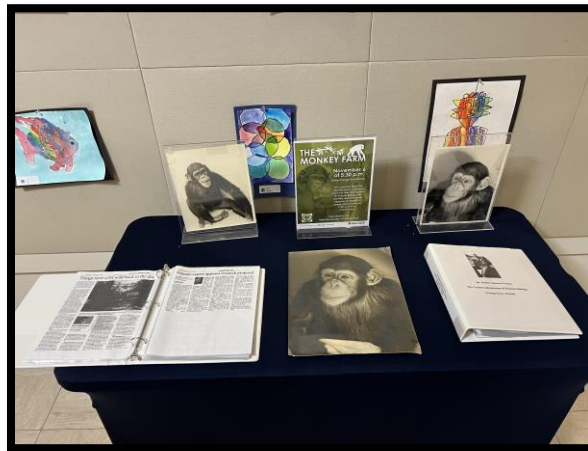
Before the Monkey Farm presentation, we conducted our Annual Meeting. Van Hogan presented a summary of the year’s activities and presented a slate of officers for the new year. The following officers were elected for 2024: President: Cindy Cheatwood, Vice President: Sandra DiGiovanni, Treasurer: Van Hogan.



**Cindy Cheatwood shares the story of Vicki the Chimp, who was raised as a child by Yerkes’ scientists, Keith and Kathy Hayes.**



**Bob Halligan shares personal recollections of the Monkey Farm, where his father worked as Caretaker in the early 1950’s.**



**Display of memorabilia pertaining to the Monkey Farm.**



### **Veterans Day Ceremony**

On Saturday, November 11, the Historical Society of Orange Park, in cooperation with the Town of Orange Park, hosted the annual Veterans Day Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery. We were blessed with good weather and a good turnout for this year's ceremony.

Van Hogan opened the ceremony and shared the story of how the memorial was conceived and constructed. At the end of his remarks, we were treated to a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron of Haller Field. The Orange Park High School NJROTC Color Guard presented the colors and we were led in the Star Spangled Banner by our dear friend, Wanda Dillaberry.



**Mrs. Wanda Dillaberry**



**The Orange Park High School NJROTC Color Guard**

We were fortunate to have an impressive lineup of speakers at this year's event. Susana Thompson, Vice Mayor of Orange Park, Judy Sweep, Regent of the Sophia Fleming Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and CAPT Ed Turner, USN (Ret), Executive Director of the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum. Each speaker shared their thoughts on the contributions of our veterans and the importance of Veterans Day. Vice Mayor Thompson and Capt Turner joined together to place a wreath at the memorial in honor of our veterans.



**Vice Mayor Susana Thompson**



**CAPT Ed Turner, USN, (Ret)**



**Vice Mayor Susana Thompson and CAPT Ed Turner place a wreath at the Veterans Memorial**



**The First Coast Highlanders**

Another prominent part of the ceremony was the announcement of the results of the annual Essay Contest and the reading of the winning essays. The winners of the essay contest were as follows:

**Elementary Division**

Topic: What is Veterans Day?

**Winner**

Isahara Monsivais, Orange Park Elementary, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

**Honorable Mention**

Brynlee Sites, Orange Park Elementary, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

Katarina Hitt, Orange Park Elementary, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

Maaz Kiram, Plantation Oaks Elementary, Teacher: Hansrani McDuffie

Piper Davies, Plantation Oaks Elementary, Teacher: Hansrani McDuffie

**Junior High Division**

Topic: Why do Veterans deserve our Support, Respect and Understanding?

**Winner**

Sophie Aranaga, Orange Park Junior High, Teacher: Cynthia Cheatwood

**Honorable Mention**

Hania Ishaq, Oakleaf Junior High, Teacher: Jeanette Burley

Elena Amponin, Oakleaf Junior High, Teacher: Jeanette Burley

Jacob Downs, Oakleaf Junior High, Teacher: Jeanette Burley

Amelia Noles, Oakleaf Junior High, Teacher: Jeanette Burley





**Cindy Cheatwood with Elementary Division Winner, Isahara Monsivais**



**Junior High Division Winner, Sophie Aranaga, with Cindy Cheatwood**

We offer our sincere congratulations to the aforementioned students for their essays and our sincere appreciation for all students that put forth the time and effort to research and prepare an essay for this contest. The winning essays have been posted to our website.

Our final speaker was Society President, Cynthia Cheatwood, who shared the stories of CAPT Scott Speicher, a Naval aviator who lost his life in the Gulf War, and CPO 'Doc' Cannington, a Naval Corpsman who lost his life saving fellow crewmembers following a shipwreck in the Vietnam War. The Society honored both men with inscribed pavers at the Veterans Memorial.

The ceremony would not be complete without the musical contributions of Wanda Dillaberry and the First Coast Highlanders. We are also grateful for the continued contributions of American Legion Post #250 Riders. Chaplain John Ruark opened and closed the ceremony in prayer followed by the playing of Taps by Cindy Anderson.



**The wreaths and flowers that decorated the memorial as well as the flowers decorating the Clarke House were provided by the Garden Club of Orange Park**



Our special thanks to the Garden Club of Orange Park, First Baptist Church of Orange Park, Sophia Fleming Chapter of the NSDAR, Orange Park Woman's Club, Scout Pack 653, the Dreamland Squadron of Haller Field, the Town of Orange Park for their support and helping us to make this ceremony possible and, last but not least, Carolyn and Mike Day for their tireless efforts in organizing this year's ceremony.

### **Clay County Cruzers**

Every now and then an unexpected gift comes our way. One such gift was given the the Society on Saturday, November 11 by the Clay County Cruzers at their car show held at Moosehaven. The Clay County Cruzers presented a check in the amount of \$1,000 to the Historical Society of Orange Park for the support and maintenance of the Veterans Memorial. We are grateful to the Clay County Cruzers for their contribution to the Veterans Memorial and, by extension, to the service and dedication of our veterans. We thank them for their generosity and their contributions to our community.



**Mike Hourihane, President of the Clay County Cruzers presents a check in the amount of \$1,000 to Van Hogan with the Historical Society of Orange Park for the support of the Veterans Memorial.**

## **Clarke House Tours**



Due to Hometown Holiday on December 8 and 9, there will be no open house at the Clarke House in the month of December on the second Sunday of the month. The regularly scheduled open house at The Clarke House will resume on Sunday, January 14 from 2 PM to 4 PM. Of course, as noted above, the Clarke House will be open to guests during Hometown Holiday in December so please stop by if you can.

## **Historical Society of Orange Park Logo Shirts and Name Tags**

Society members, show your colors! Members, you can now highlight your affiliation with the Historical Society of Orange Park with custom shirts and name tags. The shirts are grey with the Society logo on the left side. They are the perfect choice to wear when attending any HSOP event. The shirts, available in medium, large and extra-large, are priced at \$25 each. To identify yourself at community events, you can also purchase a Society name tag for \$7. Let everyone know that you are a member of the Historical Society of Orange Park and are proud to support its mission and our community.

If interested send an email to [info@ophistory.org](mailto:info@ophistory.org) to order your shirt or name tag. We will also have a limited supply of shirts available at all HSOP events.

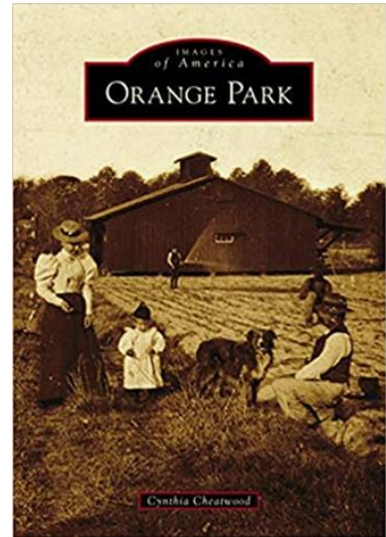


### **Images of America - Orange Park**

If you would like to learn more about the history of Orange Park, 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, CVS or various other outlets online.*

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



### **Look For Us on Online**

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, [www.ophistory.org](http://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](#)
- [Clay County Archives](#)

