



The Historical Society of Orange Park

January 2023 Newsletter

Happy New Year! The busy holiday season is behind us as we move into a new year. We trust your new year is off to a good start. The Society had a good December as we participated in Hometown Holiday and hosted members and friends at our annual Christmas gathering. It was good to see everyone visiting and enjoying the Clarke House as we celebrated the holidays.

With the arrival of the New Year, it is now time to renew your membership. We are grateful for your support and participation to continue the Society's mission to preserve and share the history of Orange Park. We will be mailing out membership renewal letters soon. Dues can be submitted via mail or you can renew online via our website at [Store \(ophistory.org\)](https://ophistory.org).

We are happy to report that the long-awaited rehabilitation of the Veterans Memorial has been completed!!! All new pavers have been installed and they look great! We invite you to stop by the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery when you have an opportunity to look over the new pavers.

Featured in this newsletter is an article by Cindy Cheatwood on the origins of various street and landmark names in Orange Park. If you've ever wondered why we have a Plainfield Avenue, who was Stiles Avenue named for or similar thoughts about other locations in town, this article provide some insight.

Please don't forget that the Clarke House will be open for tours this Sunday, January 8, from 2 PM to 4 PM. We also have a Quarterly Meeting coming up on Monday, February 6 at the Orange Park Library.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
January 8, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
February 6, 2023	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
February 12, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
March 3, 2023	5:30 PM – 8:30 PM	20 th Anniversary Gathering	Clarke House
March 4, 2023	1:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Carrie Clarke Day	Clarke House Park

Read on for additional information on these events and other activities.

February Member Meeting

The Historical Society will host a member meeting, 5:30 PM, Monday, February 6 at the Orange Park Library. The meeting will feature a presentation and discussion on the Patriot's Rebellion. In 1812, American citizens invaded Spanish East Florida with the intent of wresting control from Spain and making it an American territory. The invaders were convinced that many Spanish citizens of East Florida would prefer to be under control of the United States. For a time, Laurel Grove Plantation served as the capitol of the new Patriot Territory of East Florida. However, as with many conflicts, this one involved miscalculation, unintended consequences and long-term impacts that changed the direction of Florida. The discussion will focus on the causes of the conflict, its effects on North Florida and its aftermath.



Our 20th Anniversary is coming in March!

March 3, 2023 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Historical Society of Orange Park. Plans are currently being made to recognize this milestone with a get-together at the Clarke House, starting at 5:30 pm. All members are invited and we hope to get founding members as well as new ones together to share stories of the town over the years. Plan on bringing a dish to share, and if that dish has a story, please be ready to share that too!



To continue the commemoration, we are holding Carrie Clarke Day the next day, Saturday, March 4th. This event is still in the planning phase and all suggestions are welcome. If you have not visited the park in a while, please know that there is a spillover parking area now at the rear of the park that helps with the crowd situation.

To share the anniversary with the wider world, the Society will post monthly Facebook messages throughout 2023 to highlight different historical events of the town. Look for these on the 3rd day of each month, starting with January 3rd. If you would like to suggest a posting topic for this, please send your ideas to ophistory.org.

As we start a new year, it's a good time to reconnect with our old friends. We have accomplished a lot together and there is still so much we can do to keep the stories of our history alive in Orange Park. Happy anniversary!

Hometown Holiday

This year's Hometown Holiday celebration was a success! Once again, Hometown Holiday proved to be an excellent opportunity for area families to celebrate the holidays and enjoy our beautiful December weather. The Christmas holiday was welcomed in style by people of all ages. Attendance was very good both nights of the event. Clark House Park was full of activity as children visited with Santa, played in "Florida snow" and took rides along holiday-decorated trails through the woods. There were also a number of opportunities to find those perfect Christmas gifts among the various craft vendors on site as well as a variety of food trucks.

The historic Clarke House was decorated for the holidays and ready for visitors. Several hundred visitors toured the Clarke House and were greeted by William Clarke (John Bowles), who shared stories of the Clarke family, and Cathy Hayes (Cindy Cheatwood), who shared stories of her work at the Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology, locally known as the Monkey Farm, and her "adopted" daughter, Vicki the Chimpanzee, who was raised on the Clarke property. Other members of the Society were on hand to answer visitor questions about the house, the Clarke family and local history. On a final note, we want to acknowledge and say a special "Thank You" to the members of the Orange Park Garden Club who faithfully maintain the flower bed at the Clarke House and prepared it for the holiday celebration.

Scenes from Hometown Holiday





Christmas Gathering

On the evening of December 12, members of the Society gathered at the Clarke House to share dessert, celebrate the holidays and review another successful year. President Cindy Cheatwood shared highlights from the past year including the resumption of Carrie Clarke Day after a 2-year hiatus due to Covid, four quarterly member meetings at the Orange Park Library, an outing to

Penny Farms' new museum and a well-attended Moonlight on Magnolia event in October. Goals and objectives for the coming year were also discussed. The gathering was a good way to end the year. It's always good to spend time with friends during the holidays.

Veterans Memorial Update

The Veterans Memorial Committee has been trying to keep everyone informed on the status of the restoration project. We are pleased to report that the paver restoration project has been completed. We hope you visit the Veterans Memorial to see the results. We would love to hear your comments.

This restoration project was being discussed among the committee early in 2022. We knew we had to do something and had discussed what our options and timing might be. In the spring, we received letters from several people who had purchased engraved pavers over the years expressing concerns about fading inscriptions. That interaction with the community was the catalyst that told us we had to act quickly.

We completed our research and identified the best source of pavers that would be long-lasting due to the laser technique used in the engraving process. We estimated the cost to refurbish the Memorial and began a fundraising campaign in June 2022 with a goal to completely cover the cost of this renovation.

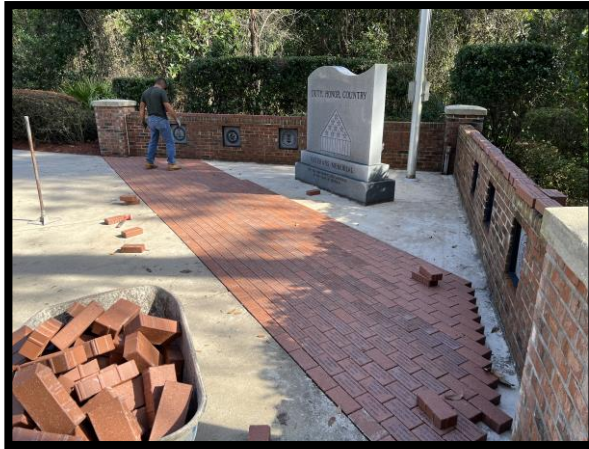
To raise funds, we created a GoFundMe website as well as personal solicitations to the community. Thanks to the overwhelming support of the community, we were able to come very close to our goal. Our fundraising efforts will continue. This will not be the last time that we will need to remediate issues at the Veterans Memorial. We are however, confident that as issues arise, we will do what is required to maintain the Veterans Memorial of Orange Park as the beautiful place to honor our Veterans that it was designed to be.



Sorting engraved pavers prior to installation



Removal of existing pavers



Installation of new pavers



Placement of sand between the new pavers

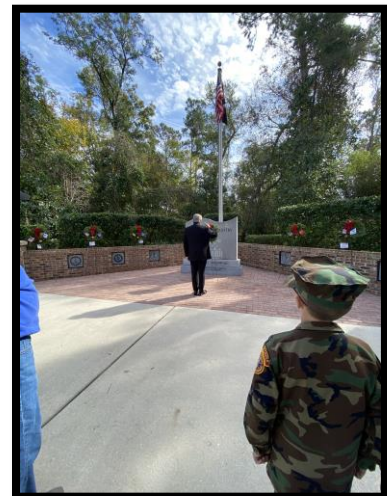


Newly completed paver installation

Wreaths Across America

For the first time, the Wreaths Across America Ceremony was held at the Veterans Memorial of Orange Park at Magnolia Cemetery on Saturday, December 17 at 12 PM. Sandra DiGiovanni was the coordinator of this first time event and spent months fundraising and identifying all the Veteran tombstones to make this event possible. The Color Guard was provided by the Black Creek Young Marines. Mayor Randy Anderson gave the keynote address, and he coordinated the laying of the wreaths at each service branch medallion at the Veterans Memorial.

After that activity, the Black Creek Young Marines, Boy Scout Troop 25 and Cub Scout packs assisted Mayor Anderson and Vice Mayor Alan Watt in laying a wreath at each of the 171



Veteran grave sites identified in the Magnolia Cemetery. They also placed 20 wreaths on the fence separating the Moosehaven Cemetery from Magnolia Cemetery.

We hope this event now takes place every year as part of the annual National Wreaths Across America salute to veterans. Thanks to Sandra DiGiovanni for making this event happen!



Orange Park Names- Food for Thought, By Cindy Cheatwood

Some of the frequently asked questions received by the Historical Society concern the meaning behind the names used around town. It is true there are many stories behind those names. To explore some of those, consider the following information.

The Town of Orange Park is so called because of the enterprising efforts of the town's founder, Washington Gano Benedict. When his Florida Winter Home and Improvement Company developed Orange Park in 1877, Benedict planted orange trees on every home lot to encourage northern transplants. Before Benedict, the town had been a plantation under several owners, starting as the Crisp Grant in 1765, then becoming Laurel Grove Plantation in the 1770s when William and Rebecca Pengree tamed the land and established the first homestead here. After the Pengrees, Zephaniah Kingsley developed the property even further before losing it in the Patriot's Rebellion of 1812.

We in the Society are also often asked about the origin of the name "Doctor's Lake" (called Lake Levett after Francis Levett land grant, during the British period). There is really no good explanation that historians agree upon. Dr. John Bartram wrote about it on February 6, 1766, and so some think it is named for him. However, in his journal he writes that he is going there to stay with a man who had lived there a long time. So, if he referred to visiting "Doctors Lake", even though it is actually an inlet, not a lake, he certainly is not the source of the name.



**Florida Winter Home and Improvement
Company Plat of Orange Park**

Teresa Miller, first principal of Grove Park Elementary, and the portion south of the railroad track is now Dogwood Lane.

Some of the names associated with the FWHI Company remain. Blake Avenue is named for Alpheus Perley Blake, a Massachusetts land developer, second in command for the Company. He also developed some other places in Florida including the town of Blake, Florida, named for him until 1930, when the name changed to South Daytona. Loring Avenue is named for David Loring, the Company's Secretary and Treasurer (Loring's ancestor signed the Mayflower Compact of 1620). Eldridge Avenue is named for John F. Eldridge, an early investor in the company and early resident. He served as mayor and town clerk of Orange Park. Mr. Eldridge had a sugar refinery business in Orange Park, which a 1900 newspaper reported as having 100 acres of sugar cane planted. Eldridge also worked with the Hotel Marion (formerly Parkview Hotel).

Several streets are named for early residents. Campbell Avenue is named for O. E. Campbell, who was first President of OP Town Council. There are also Shaw Street (named for W.A./ E.K. Shaw), and Carnes Street named for J. Vincent Carnes who ran a fishing business, first off River Road and then on Doctors Lake where Rob

By the time Benedict's company purchased the property it was in bad shape. He masterfully marketed the land. A map of 1884 lays out the original 55 streets in the town limits. Of those names, 26 are no longer in use, roughly 46% having been renamed. Some of those gone represent important names in the town's story, such as Copeland, May, Holt and Hookey as well as names of men on the board of directors for the Florida Winter Home and Improvement Company. Copeland references a Union general, Joseph Tarr Copeland who came here and became a judge. May was an early settler who had been a judge in Milwaukee, WI. Though his name left the map, Milwaukee Avenue still honors him. E. N. Holt owned the first store and post office in Orange Park along with Edward Sabin. Catherine Hookey owned Laurel Grove during the Civil War. Hookey Street's name got changed somehow to Hooker Street and people objected. The portion of the street north of the railroad track is now Miller Street, named for



Bradley Conservation Park is now. Morgan Circle (and Street) are named for Stanley and Nellie Morgan, early residents who owned a store in the first half of the 1900s. Plainfield Avenue is named to recognize the Ball family's hometown, early residents of the town. McDower Avenue (turpentine industry), Fillmore Lane (tavern/restaurant on Kingsley), and Solomon Street are named for early African American families in the town.

Stiles Avenue (and Lane) recognizes the family of Benjamin Franklin Stiles who came to Florida for health and pleasure in 1868, and returned every winter thereafter until 1872, when he arrived very ill, with pneumonia. From 119 pounds his weight has increased to 180 pounds. He stayed here year-round after that; bought 60 acres of riverfront in Orange Park, with a grove of 30 acres containing 2,300 trees, said to be the largest in Clay County. Stiles was a grandson of the sixth Yale College president, Rev. Ezra Stiles, a personal friend of Benjamin Franklin.

Some other early historically recognized names include Mound Street, which did have two documented Timucua mounds as well as Fatio Lane, named the Spanish wife of George Fleming (Hibernia Plantation, Fleming Island). Egremont Drive remembers the Earl of Egremont, Secretary of State for the Southern Department during the British occupation of Florida. Laurel Grove Lane recalls the plantation history of the town, as does Kingsley Avenue (owner of Laurel Grove, 1803-1814), Anna Avenue (Kingsley's wife), and McIntosh Lane. John Houston McIntosh was the owner of Laurel Grove Plantation from 1814-1836.



The only street that relates to the town's founder is Gano Ave, named after Washington Gano Benedict's grandmother's maiden name. Stowe Avenue and Beecher Lane are reminders that Harriett Beecher Stowe was here for a couple of years after the Civil War, before relocating to Mandarin. Reed Street is named for Arthur M. Reed, a Jacksonville neighbor, the owner of Mulberry Grove Plantation, 1861-1899; NAS Jax is built there now.

DeBarry Avenue was the misspelled name of Count Fredrik deBary, a wealthy wine importer, businessman and steamboat line owner. Count deBary cornered the market for Mums champagne, generating a fortune that helped him build a prosperous steamship line.

The area we know as Club Continental has significant history. Winterbourne Drive (and Street) takes the name of the earliest local residence of the B.J. Johnson family. Johnson Slough is also named for this founder of the B.J. Johnson Soap Company, later to become Palmolive. Other names related to the family include Via Tisdale (Col. Achilles Tisdale married Margaret Masse, granddaughter of BJ Johnson) and a family friend is recalled with Astor Street. William Astor was 3rd Viscount Astor, a yachting friend of Caleb Massee, BJ's son-in-law. Caleb built a large estate next to the family's Winterbourne house that had been added onto many times over the years. The new mansion was named Mira Rio, recalling days of travel in Europe. During World War Two, Mira Rio was called Azaleana Manor, serving as housing for pilots in training. After the

war, that name was retired until being resurrected for newly renovated rental units on the property. When Mira Rio was converted into a member's club, the name Club Continental was added.

Some names reflect residents who came later. For example, Dudley Branch, a spur off Johnson Slough, is most likely named for the only Dudley in Orange Park's story, Peter Dudley, African-American farmer who lived near the railroad depot. Annie Keyes, a local educator, and civil rights worker, has an honorary street named for her. Once called Railroad Avenue, it now sports a brown historical street sign in recognition of her contribution to the community. There are also Floyd, Ralph, Wells and Smith families who established homes when the town was a few decades old.

Still more recent names include Fromhart Street, named for Richard Fromhart, who was a driving force in the creation of Orange Park Athletic Association. Nelson Drive is named after John Nelson, a World War Two veteran who came to Orange Park and established a large homestead on Doctors Lake. Mr. Nelson had the road named after himself, something that does not happen very often. His land is now the site of Rob Bradley Conservation Park, named in honor of Robert Bradley, Jr. who faithfully served Orange Park in the Florida Senate for eight years.

When the 1884 map was drawn up there were two Smith Streets. One, that was Jo. Smith Street is gone, but the other continues. Perhaps he was a family member though the two streets were somewhat distant from each other on that early map.

Preble Court is named for a resident who ran greyhounds at the dog track, according to Arthur Hall, a founder of the Society who worked for Mr. Preble as a boy in the 1930s. Walking the greyhounds to cool them down after they raced. Another Plainfield connector, Silver Wing Circle, has its name explained by the same founder. There was a tavern nestled back in the woods that had that name. Arthur Hall and other boys of the town gathered bottles from all around the town and were paid a penny each as these were washed and reused by the tavern keeper.

In Orange Park today there are over 40 streets with names that reflect nature. These include animals, trees, flowers, and at least one weed (dog fennel). There are also some quirky names like Candy Lane, Chablis Court, Freckles Court, and Upchucks Lane. There are at least six streets with the first name of ladies.

We have names for parks in the town as well. Clarke Park is named for William and Carrie Clarke, a local family who ran a prosperous pecan grove and helped their community at every opportunity. Somer's Sunshine Park was named to remember a local girl slain on her way home from school.

So, for a small town, there is a lot of history to be learned in asking why names were chosen. If you know the story behind any names not listed here, please share the story with us at

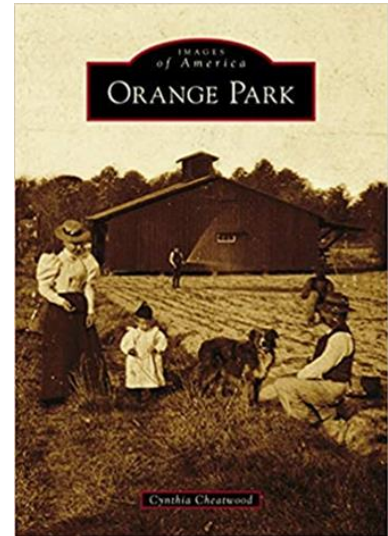
info@ophistory.org . Also, if you have your own interpretation of Doctor's Lake, we'd like to hear that too.

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, CVS 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, January 8 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 Online

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, www.ophistory.org, or the next time you visit Facebook. Check for updates on society news and activities.

