



The Historical Society of Orange Park

June 2022 Newsletter

Welcome, June! We have reached the time of year where it is much more advantageous to park in the shade at the far end of a parking lot rather than parking in the sun near an entrance. Large oak trees are much more inviting. This month, the Society will conduct an outing to the Penny Farms Historic Museum. We are looking forward to the trip and hope some of you will be able to join us. Our efforts to upgrade the Veterans Memorial continue as well. The poor condition of many of our original engraved pavers is disappointing but technology has provided options to procure pavers that will last for many years to come. We look forward to updating the memorial as time and funding permit. This month, we also celebrate our new Earl Harrington Community Service Award recipient, Carolyn Clark.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
June 12, 2022	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 21, 2022	10:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Member Outing	Penny Farms Historic Museum
July 10, 2022	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

Additional information on these events can be found below.

Earl Harrington Community Service Award

We are happy to announce that **Carolyn Clark** is the recipient of the annual Earl Harrington Community Service Award. Carolyn is a long-time resident of the town and has been heavily involved in the life of the community. She loves the Town of Orange Park and is passionate about preserving its history. She is a founding member of the Historical Society, has served on its Board of Directors and has been a driving force behind our annual Carrie Clarke Day celebration since its inception. She has participated in numerous events on behalf of the Society to promote local history including Moonlight on Magnolia, Hometown Holiday and hosting student tours of the Clarke House. She has also been instrumental in acquiring period furnishings and caring for the Clarke House. We are grateful for Carolyn's contributions to the Town of Orange Park, its various civic organizations and our Society. We are pleased to honor her as this year's recipient of the Earl Harrington Award!



Carolyn Clark and Cindy Cheatwood

Member Outing to the Penny Farms Historic Museum

At 10 AM, Tuesday, June 21, the Society invites its members to meet at Penny Farms for a tour of their new historical museum. The museum is adjacent to the Town Hall at 4100 Clark Avenue, just one block off of the J.C. Penney Memorial Scenic Highway (SR 16). Come learn about the unique history of Penny Farms as the town prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2027. Our visit to Penny Farms will also include a tour of the town followed by lunch. Members are welcome to either drive directly to Penny Farms or, for members that prefer to carpool or need a ride, we will meet at Clarke House Park the morning of the outing. We will leave for Penny Farms no later than 9:15 AM so that we can arrive at the museum by 10 AM. We look forward to a good outing and learning more about our neighbors to the south in Penny Farms.



For information about the Penny Farms Historic Museum, please visit their website at [Penney Farms Historic Museum - Historical Society of Penney Farms](https://www.penneyfarms.com).

Veterans Memorial Update

In the last issue of the monthly newsletter, we mentioned that we were working on a project to address ongoing maintenance of the Veterans Memorial area. The work to restore the 3 benches and the Memorial itself has been completed and we think it has made a very noticeable difference.

We are now focused on the pavers. Many of the engraved pavers have been installed for over 10 years and have shown marked signs of deterioration in the lettering that in many cases make the pavers almost unreadable. We must address this issue.

We are in the process of identification of the pavers that need to be replaced and also the best company to provide the engraved pavers. We hope to have this phase of the project done by the end of June and have the replacement and new pavers installed at the Memorial by the end of September to be ready in time for our next Veterans Day Ceremony.



Faded Original Paver



Sample New Paver

In reviewing the costs for acquiring new pavers, engraving and installation it has become clear that costs have increased across the board. We have provided the engraved 4 x 8 brick paver for the past 10 years for a \$50 donation to the Veterans Memorial. We now find that with the cost increases the price of a new 4 x 8 engraved paver will be a \$100 donation.

We want to ensure that we provide sufficient notice to all of our members and supporters so we will maintain the \$50 price thru our next cycle of paver orders which will be submitted no later than July 30, 2022.

If you have been considering buying a paver to honor a friend or relative for installation at the Veterans Memorial, please do so by that date and be sure to tell your friends and family about this price change as well.

We will be conducting a fundraiser to help offset the costs of the replacement pavers. We will keep you informed of the progress of this project in our next newsletter.

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

On May 9, a general meeting was held at the Orange Park Library. At this meeting, we discussed a visit to Laurel Grove Plantation by the world-famous author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Mrs. Stowe wrote about her visit in letters, in her book, *Palmetto Leaves*, and most specifically, in an article for *Atlantic Magazine*, dated May 1879. Mrs. Stowe's descriptions of her visit provide us with the best description of the old plantation and a good description of the challenges of farming and managing a plantation in the aftermath of the Civil War.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the economies of the Confederate States were in ruins. As people turned away from the business of war to the business of living, they had to find new ways of generating income. The economy of the old South was based on agriculture. With the end of slavery, plantation owners, anxious to see their property productive again, had to find new ways to make their land profitable. Their options were typically to hire workers or lease the land to others, often for a share of the profits from their operations.



Harriet Beecher Stowe

Laurel Grove Plantation was no exception. The once thriving plantation purchased by Catherine Hookey in 1863, was in ruins after being abandoned during the war. After the war, two young Union Army veterans named Kinney and Chamberlin, decided they could make their fortune growing cotton. They noted that land was cheap and there were a large number of freedmen, knowledgeable in cotton farming, looking for work. To that end, they leased Laurel Grove Plantation, hired a work force and went to work. They gravely miscalculated their costs and soon realized they were underfunded. After a year, they sought additional partners. Fred Stowe, son of Harriett and Calvin Stowe, heard their story and was interested. His mother was also interested. Fred, recently discharged from the Army, was a troubled young man. He had a history of alcohol abuse and had also been injured at Gettysburg. He was trying to get back on his feet after the war. His mother thought that good, outdoor work in relatively remote north Florida would be a great opportunity for Fred to get his life in order. She also liked the idea of providing jobs to freedmen as she knew they would need opportunities in the new economy. Harriett decided to invest \$10,000 in the venture. Fred and his cousin, Christopher Foote, joined Kinney and Chamberlin and the four of them traveled to Laurel Grove in the fall of 1866.

Laurel Grove Plantation was still functional but in disarray. The house, outbuildings and slave quarters were still intact but suffering from disuse and disrepair. Harriett visited the plantation for the first time in March 1867. She was curious about Florida, probably due to descriptions of the area by her half-brother, James Beecher, who was stationed in Jacksonville during the Civil War. She also wanted to see for herself how her son was doing and what could be done to help

the former slaves. She was accompanied by her brother, Charles Beecher, and Spencer's wife, Marcia, and their baby.

The party arrived at Laurel Grove late one afternoon. They walked about a half-mile inland to the house through the deep, soft sand and cotton fields. The house was a 1-1/2-story house with a 12' wide veranda in front surrounded by a picket fence under a cluster of oaks.

Mrs. Stowe noted the broken windows and general disrepair of the house. The plantation had sat abandoned for three years and was used by various wanderers or stragglers that decided to stay for a time. Most of the windows were broken and a door hinge was also broken. No one had made any effort at repair.

A wide hallway ran straight through the house, from front to back, with rooms on either side. At one end of the veranda, connected by a short, covered walkway, was an octagonal building, with a large window in each side, which was used as a music room. Nearby was another building with four rooms that was used as a school for the planter's children. It also included living quarters for the teachers.



We believe this to be a photograph of the plantation schoolhouse taken (circa 1901). The Rev. T.S. Perry of the Congregational Church of Orange Park offered this description of the schoolhouse in 1896: *"Only the schoolhouse now remains perhaps a survival of the fittest. It is still in tolerable repair, and though the roof is thickly covered in mosses and parasitic plants, it is fairly tight."*

Mrs. Stowe also noted the coarse construction of the house. There were few finishing touches, and the carpentry work was not done by a craftsman. She surmised the work had been done by self-taught slaves and noted that a plantation was its own domain. Its needs were provided for by its workers who were primarily self-taught and unskilled.

In addition to these buildings, Mrs. Stowe noted a "village of well-built and comfortable little houses" for the workers, which were former slave quarters. She also noted an overseer's house, a large barn and a gin-house for the cotton. Other structures included a large, roofed brick oven, a double-walled (insulated) milk-room on posts and a smoke house. There was also a kitchen separate from the house.

The tenants were working 200 acres for their cotton project. They hired approximately 100 freedmen and women to provide labor and knowledge needed to grow cotton. These workers had taken advantage of their newfound freedom and had traveled from across the south looking for good employment opportunities. The workers lived on the property and had written contracts for the work with pay ranging from \$8 - \$12 per month. When it came to farming, the workers were basically doing the same work they had always done so they tended to stay in the same routines as before. The Head Man, Mose, came out at dawn and blew a shell to gather the workers. Mose divided the workers into gangs, assigned them a task then sent them to work in the fields. They worked about 3 hours then came back in for breakfast, went back out until they stopped for dinner then worked until night.

For relaxation, the workers would gather for prayer meeting in the evening where they would sing hymns and listen to sermons. These gatherings would often continue until around 11 PM.

Stowe's party brought books with them, which they distributed to the workers in an effort to teach them to read. They found that the children picked up reading quickly but the adults had a very difficult time.

The farmers were optimistic about their cotton crop. They hoped to earn \$20,000, which meant a \$10,000 profit. The crop was looking good but, in the end, the entire crop was eaten by Army Worms in a matter of days. In addition to the worms, other contributing factors doomed the enterprise. The four tenant farmers did not know their crop and were ill-suited to the work. Fred, often late for work or absent, was not an effective manager. The hired workers, without effective leadership, were not as productive as they could have been. Costs were also up since plantations were no longer self-sustaining. Food and supplies had to be bought and shipped in at a high cost. Mrs. Stowe lost her \$10,000 investment. The final harvest was only two bales of cotton however, despite their loss, their workers were paid.

Fortunately, the significant losses at Laurel Grove did not end Mrs. Stowe's investment in the area. While picking up her mail across the river in the village of Mandarin, Mrs. Stowe found a piece of property she liked and purchased it. She and her husband, Calvin, ended up wintering there for the next 17 years (1868 - 1884).

While living in Mandarin, she continued to write. She wrote a series of articles about Florida and travel for periodicals which ended up becoming a book entitled, *Palmetto Leaves*. She also continued to write other articles promoting the virtues of life in Florida and encouraging northerners to either visit as tourists or move here permanently to grow crops. People came in droves. Her popularity made her home a tourist attraction.

She also continued her work to educate the children of former slaves. With help from the Freedman's Bureau, a school was built near her home that was also used as a church. Both black and white children attended. The building burned down in 1872 but was replaced by another

structure that still stands today as the Mandarin Community Center. Stowe was also instrumental in encouraging the Episcopal Church to build churches in Florida.

Fred, unfortunately, did not fare as well. His problems with alcohol abuse continued. Fred decided to go to sea to avoid the continuing spotlight on him and his family. He travelled to San Francisco where he simply disappeared in 1871. His mother never gave up hope that she might one day hear from him.

Sources:

Mandarin Museum and Historical Society

Our Florida Plantation, Atlantic Magazine, HB Stowe, May 1879

Harriett Beecher Stowe in Florida, 1867-1884, Olav Thulesius

Beechers, Stowes and Yankee Strangers, John T. Foster and Sarah Whitmer Foster

Art Guild of Orange Park

The Art Guild of Orange Park will host Bella Notte, An Evening of Art, on September 15, 2022, from 6:00 PM until 10:00 PM at the Azaleana Manor Orange Park, Florida. For more information, please visit their website at [BELLA NOTTE - Art Guild of Orange Park](#).



World War II Plane Crash Site Tour

On July 20, 1944, two Army lieutenants took off from Pinellas County in P-51 Mustang fighters on a training mission. They deviated from their assigned flight plan to fly over the home of one of the pilots in the Riverside area of Jacksonville. As the pilots flew low over the neighborhood, one clipped a tree which resulted in both planes crashing, killing both pilots and one resident on the ground and damaging several homes. You can read a detailed account of the accident and see photographs of the aftermath in these July 21, 2012 Florida Times-Union articles, [Remembering Jacksonville plane crash that shook Post Street in 1944](#) and [Archives: Army pilot killed in 1944 plane crash while trying to greet mom \(jacksonville.com\)](#)

At 10:00 on the morning of Wednesday, July 20, local historian, Mr. Red Henry, will host a walk-through and discussion of the 1944 Post Street plane crash, starting at the northwest corner of Post and King Streets, and walking four blocks to Willow Branch Avenue. The public is invited, to tour the area and learn more about this dramatic and tragic event in Riverside history. Dress for hot sunny weather and be ready to walk four, long blocks.

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.

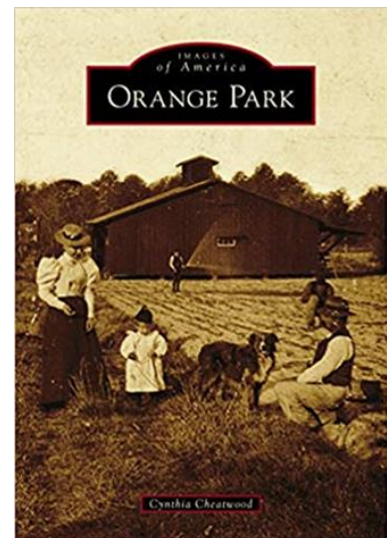


Images of America - Orange Park

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, June 12 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.