



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## June 2024 Newsletter

Summer is upon us! The heat and humidity are back. This is the time of year when the parking spots near the entrance to the grocery store are ignored in favor of parking spots in the shade. Be mindful of the heat and stay hydrated.

The Historical Society's pace of activities might slow down a bit during the summer months but we don't stop! In addition to our monthly Open House at the Clarke House, this month features an outing to Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island. Orange Park and Fort George Island are connected through the persons of Zephaniah and Anna Kingsley. Zephaniah and Anna owned the prosperous plantation of Laurel Grove, the site of present-day Orange Park, in the early 1800's. The turmoil wrought by the Patriots' Rebellion and ensuing lawlessness of the 1810's destroyed Laurel Grove Plantation and made it uninhabitable for their family and enslaved workers. They moved to Ft. George Island in early 1814 to the site of a plantation owned by John H. McIntosh, which had also been all but destroyed during the rebellion. The relative security of Ft. George Island allowed the Kingsley family and their enslaved workers to rebuild the plantation into a thriving enterprise. Today, the Kingsley Plantation provides a window into a very different time in northeast Florida. You can learn more about the outing to the Kingsley Plantation elsewhere in this newsletter. Please make plans to join us!

### Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
June 9, 2024	2:00 PM – 4: 00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 12, 2024	8:30 AM – 4:00 PM	Annual Society Outing	Kingsley Plantation
July 14, 2024	2:00 PM – 4: 00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
August 11, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
August 26, 2024	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library

### May Quarterly Meeting: George CD Allen

**By Bob Scallan**

It has always amazed me to think about heroes in our midst. We cross them every day...at Publix, Walmart, the doctor's office. And we don't even realize it. Each one of them is filled with amazing and interesting stories of personal sacrifice, overcoming fear to survive, doing the unspeakable...so that we can live free in a society filled with rights and liberties not found anywhere else on earth.

Most of these heroes don't want recognition, but we owe them more than that - gratitude, praise, indebtedness, and much more. Living in an area filled with military installations, so many heroes live right here among us. The Historical Society of Orange Park was honored to recognize a former resident of Orange Park and local hero - George C.D. Allen - at its quarterly meeting on May 6th. Guest speaker George Allen, Jr. told the amazing story of his dad's life. Entering the Marine Corps in the late 1950's, George served two years before deciding that he wanted to be an Army Green Beret and transitioned over to the Army. He trained to be a paratrooper making over 500 jumps, and in the early 1960's he knew he was going to an obscure place on the map called Vietnam. Sgt. Allen trained hard to perfect his skills as a green beret and became quite proficient at his job. George Allen served three tours of duty earning a host of medals and citations including the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. It was not until the final 3 weeks of his final tour that he was severely injured by an anti-personnel mine.



As with many veterans, assimilating back to civilian life was difficult and resulted in a divorce. George then began a series of moves that took him to south Florida, the Keys, then Costa Rica. Nearly twenty years after his discharge living on a remote hilltop in South America, the U.S. government tracked down Sgt. Allen and requested his assistance in training Panamanian soldiers in the use of Vietnam-era communications equipment. Several days later, these troops were part of the operation that ousted Panamanian military leader, Manuel Noriega. The year was 1989.



The historical society members and guests were enthralled with George Jr's passion about his dad. His display of an old uniform, photos, citations, ribbons, patches, and a flag along with the in-depth stories brought the history of George C. D. Allen to life.

Sgt. Allen is one of the more prominent residents of Magnolia Cemetery. If you should ever take a stroll through the cemetery and notice the headstone etched with George CD Allen, know that resting below is a true American hero who made his own indelible mark on the world.

The Historical Society would like to extend a heartfelt "thank you" to George Jr. and the family members who attended the meeting and shared their intimate memories of Sgt. Allen.



### Orange Park Memories

Each 1st day of the month during 2024, the Historical Society of Orange Park is sharing vintage newspaper items, clipped from July 3, 1964's *The Breeze* newspaper (1959 to 1971). This month we welcome warmer weather as we flash back to summer days gone by. Check out the contributions of the Orange Park Lion's Club that helped contain the "restlessness" of local kids. The Lions Club sponsored a day camp at Camp Seminole, which was located at the current site of The Springs neighborhood on Doctors Lake Drive.



## Youngsters Having a Ball at Day Camp

Mr. Frank Pedroni, President of the Orange Park Lions Club is happy about the enthusiasm shown by all youngsters attending Camp Seminole, the Summer Day Camp being sponsored by the Lions Club.

The Day Camp program is being conducted for the purpose of furnishing supervised training activities for children between the ages of 6 and 13. The bus transporting the children will pick them up in the Orange Park, Meadowbrook, Bellair, Ortega Hills and Doctors Inlet areas.

Mr. Dick Jones, the coach and counselor for the camp announces that the children participate wholeheartedly in all activities offered. These activities include swimming, archery, riflery, ping pong, tumbling, softball, nature lore, and other games. These sports are enjoyed for only \$10 per week.

This venture is one of many non-profit enterprises of the Orange Park Lions Club and the

proceeds will go to its College Scholarship Fund.

The Lions Club has extended an invitation for free admission to this camp to about twenty children from the Baptist Children's Home of Jacksonville. They also extended the same invitation to the churches of Orange Park for children who would not otherwise have an opportunity to go to a summer camp.

Enough time has passed since schools have been out for the children to start getting restless. This summer camp provides an educational and economical way for mothers to "get Junior out of her hair."

Camp Seminole will be offered from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily thru July 31st. Campers will bring their own lunch, swim suit, and towel. Camp will serve milk and ice cream.

For information about enrollment call Mrs. Mildren Peterson, Camp Secretary, at 264-6657.

## Red Cross Swim Classes Start Monday

The second session of the American Red Cross - Public School Swim Program will get under way Monday, July 6, at the Hyde Park pool, located on Hyde Grove Avenue. Classes begin at 8:15 a.m. and are every 45 minutes Monday through Friday. Registration should be at the pool in person from 9-12 a.m. There is no charge for these lessons only the nominal pool fee will be required. All levels of swimming will be taught and anyone over 7 years old or having finished the first grade is eligible to register for lessons.

There will be a third session beginning July 20 and running through July 31.

## Outing to Kingsley Plantation



Join us for a special ranger-led tour of Zephaniah Kingsley's home (after his time in Orange Park), including the "big house" and grounds. We will meet at 8:30 AM, Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, to carpool to the site of the former estate on Fort George Island, in Duval County, where we will meet with the ranger at 10 AM.

We will explore the grounds at Kingsley Plantation, which include the slave quarters, barn, waterfront, planter's house, kitchen house, and

interpretive garden. The visitor contact station/bookstore is located in a 1920s building adjacent to the plantation buildings. After strolling the grounds and touring the buildings we will take a ferry ride into Mayport for lunch. We will enjoy a leisurely meal before returning to the plantation site and then back to Orange Park.

As most of you know, Kingsley's wife, a former slave named Anna Madgigine Jai, came to Florida in 1806 when she was 13 years old, after being carried to Cuba from West Africa. He freed her in 1811 and charged her with running his Laurel Grove plantation at Doctors Lake in modern-day Orange Park and later she managed the Fort George Island site until being forced to leave Florida as the threat of American slavery loomed large. For the protection of their children, Anna, her children and some of the family's slaves fled to Haiti for years before returning to Florida after Zephaniah's death, to claim his estate. Come join us to hear the rest of the story!

Kingsley Plantation is open Wednesday through Sunday, from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, except on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is free.



### **Veterans Memorial Update**

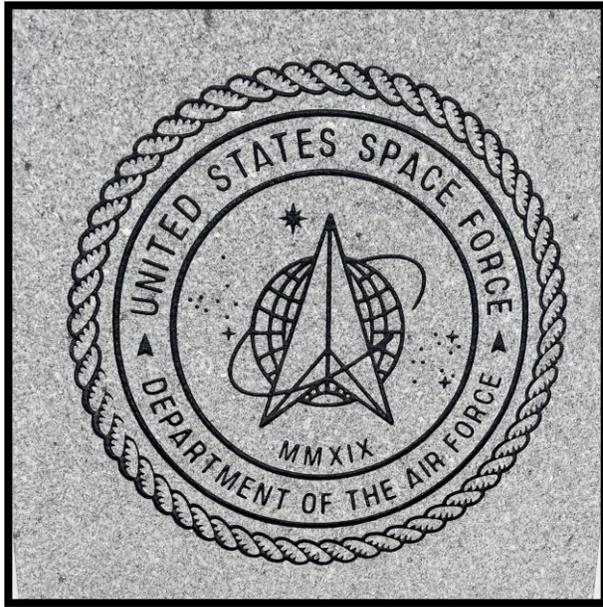
We continue to be grateful for the community support of our veterans and the Veterans Memorial. We are pleased to report that we received a donation in the amount of \$1,000 for the support and maintenance of the memorial from the Clay County Cruzers. The presentation was made in conjunction with the recent car show held at Moosehaven on Saturday, May 11. Several students were also awarded college scholarships as part of the event. The car show brought together a large group of car lovers and their cars on a beautiful Saturday. The large array of makes and models of automobiles generated all sorts of conversation and made this a true community event that welcomed people of all ages and backgrounds. Our sincere thanks to the Clay County Cruzers for their generous contribution! If you are looking to have some fun, we encourage you to visit their next car show. For more information on the Clay County Cruzers, please visit [Clay County Cruzers – Car Club Northeast Florida](http://Clay County Cruzers – Car Club Northeast Florida).



On Monday, May 27, the Town of Orange Park hosted the community’s Memorial Day service at the Veterans Memorial. The ceremony featured remarks by Mayor Randy Anderson, a reading of the poem, Flanders Field, by Town Manager, Sarah Campbell and a Memorial Day message form featured speaker, Army and Marine veteran, Frederick Gilmore, Jr., who currently serves as Commandant of the Roy S. Geiger Detachment 1047 in Orange Park.



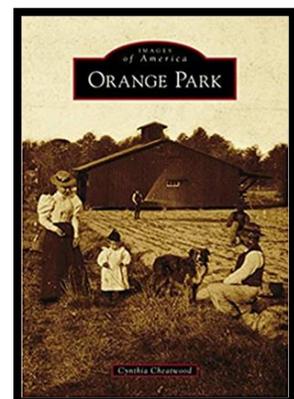
Thanks to the generosity and personal involvement of Mr. John Shipley of Jacksonville Memory Gardens, we have procured the two new medallions representing the United States Space Force and our POW/MIA's. We are currently working with a local brick mason to install these new medallions at the Veterans Memorial. We hope to have the new medallions installed in the next couple of months. We look forward to the completion of this enhancement of the memorial so that it might better represent all who served.



**Reminder: Inscribed pavers honoring the veterans of your choice are still available for purchase.** All pavers ordered by July 31, 2024, will be installed prior to this year's Veterans Day Ceremony in November. Paver order forms can be found on our website, [www.ophistory.org](http://www.ophistory.org). What a wonderful way to honor those who have served!

### **Images of America: Orange Park**

Images of America: Orange Park, authored by Historical Society President, Cynthia Cheatwood, is a wonderful way to learn about the history of Orange Park. To date, we have been able to offer this book for sale at a cost of \$15 for Historical Society of Orange Park members, \$20 for non-members and \$21 for online orders. However, as our costs have increased due to inflation, we are forced to increase the price of this book. As of July 1, the cost of the book will increase as follows: \$20 for members of our Society, \$25 for non-members and \$27 for online sales. If you are interested in purchasing this book, please consider doing so soon to avoid the price increase.



## **Clarke House Tours**



The Clarke House will be open to the public for tours on Sunday, June 9, from 2 PM to 4 PM. The Clarke House, built in 1912, served as the family home for William and Carrie Clarke for many years. It features hardwood floors, plastered walls and ceilings and large, spacious rooms with many windows for good ventilation. It was a comfortable home and the Clarke family shared many happy memories there. Stop by for a visit on June 9 and make some memories of your own and feel free to share recollections that the house inspires.

## **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](#)
- [Keystone Heights Heritage Commission](#)
- [Clay County Archives](#)

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