



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## March 2023 Newsletter

Spring has arrived! The azaleas are in bloom, trees are beginning to bud and grass is growing again. It's a nice time of year so we hope you can get out and enjoy this outstanding weather.

March features two important Society events. The first is a celebration of the Historical Society's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Society was formed in 2003 by a group of dedicated Orange Park residents with strong ties to the community and a love of history. We plan to honor them and celebrate the Society's anniversary on the evening of Friday, March 3 at the Clarke House.

The following day, Saturday, March 4, we will celebrate the 19<sup>th</sup> Carrie Clarke Day. This event, honoring the many contributions of Mrs. Carrie Clarke to community life will be held at Clarke House Park. Join us at the park to visit Mrs. Clarke's home and enjoy the grounds. We are excited to have the Art Guild of Orange Park and Garden Club Orange Park joining us for this event. The park and the playground will remain open so there will be plenty to do for the entire family.

Please remember that the Clarke House will also be open for tours this month on Sunday, March 12, from 2 PM to 4 PM. Stop by and share local history with a friend.

### Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
March 3, 2023	5:30 PM – 8:30 PM	20 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gathering	Clarke House
March 4, 2023	11:00 AM – 5:00 PM	Carrie Clarke Day	Clarke House Park
March 12, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
April 16, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

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

### **Our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is coming in March!**

March 3, 2023 will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Historical Society of Orange Park! Please join us to recognize this milestone with a dinner 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.



**Founding Members of the Historical Society of Orange Park, March 2003**

**Front Row: Carolyn Clark, Art Hall, Sarah Bedsole, Cindy Clark**

**Middle Row: Evelyn Hall, Marge Fachko, Carol Hogan, Faye Irvin, Sandy Townsley, Carol McConnell, Juanita Hargrove**

**Back Row: Mary Ann Study, Ken Study, Mary Webb, Billie Weaver, Claude Bass, Earl Harrington, June Nelson, John Nelson**

Please join us as we host a special commemoration to recognize our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Society. In the spirit of Clarke hospitality, we are asking folks to bring a covered dish. It would be fun to have dishes that might have a family story to go with them, they will make for charming memories shared!

In addition to the food and fellowship we will have a couple of fun activities to mark the occasion. We don't want to give too much away, but let's just say the more you know about the town's history, the more fun you will have.



**The Clarke House: 2003 to Today**

To continue the commemoration, we are holding Carrie Clarke Day the next day, Saturday, March 4<sup>th</sup> from 11 AM to 5 PM. This event will feature tours of Mrs. Clarke's home and stories of the Clarke family's many contributions to the Town of Orange Park. There will also be flowerpot decorating hosted by the Art Guild of Orange Park combined with a planting activity hosted by the Garden Club of Orange Park. 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 for your convenience.

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 3<sup>rd</sup> day of each month. If you would like to suggest a posting topic for this, please send your ideas to [info@ophistory.org](mailto:info@ophistory.org).

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!



### **The Founding of the Historical Society of Orange Park**

The Clarke House has long been associated with the Historical Society of Orange Park. The Society has hosted many meetings, presentations, tours, and dinners there. The Clarke House is also the centerpiece of annual events such as Carrie Clarke Day and Hometown Holiday.

One of the reasons the Clarke House is so closely associated with the Society is that it provided the impetus for the founding of this historical society. The Town of Orange Park purchased the Clarke property in the early 1990's and began to develop it as a recreational park. Over the years amenities were added, including a large playground for children, which was a huge attraction for families. By the early 2000's, due to the park's popularity, parking was at a premium.

The old Clarke family home, which now sat empty, and its outbuildings remained on the property however, the space they occupied was needed for the visiting public. Efforts got underway to demolish some of the outbuildings to provide room for additional parking.

The status of the Clarke House remained uncertain. The house was not accessible to the public, had sat empty for years and was in serious need of repairs. Some called for the demolition of the house, which made sense from a strictly financial perspective.

Others saw value in preserving the old house. They recalled the contributions of the Clarke family and their impact on life of Orange Park. William Clarke served as mayor of the town. Carrie served several terms as President of the Orange Park Woman's Club and taught Sunday School on their porch. The Clarke's were instrumental in the establishment of the Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Orange Park. They also hosted weddings in their home for friends and neighbors. In short, there were a lot of good memories associated with the old house.

Orange Park had changed quickly from a small town to a community surrounded by many new homes and businesses as result of the growth of Jacksonville and military bases in the area. The iconic structures that had long been a part of the town and were so familiar to long-time residents were disappearing.

The older homes reflected the character of the town. Constant population growth and ever-increasing traffic were erasing that character and it was in danger of being forgotten. The old homes also reminded us of the people that settled and built Orange Park, of their contributions to community life and how they made Orange Park such a nice place to live. As the Town's new logo proclaims, Orange Park is "Closer to What Matters". Our history matters. Knowing our history and having tangible connections to our history keep us closer to that history and reminds us that we have benefited from those that came before us and that we have an obligation to those that follow.

The Town decided to determine if the Clarke House could be preserved. They undertook a study to ascertain the costs to make repairs to the Clarke House to see if it was feasible to restore the historic home. However, the restoration of the house, even if financially feasible, would not be practical if the house had no purpose. The concept of a group dedicated to the preservation of the Town's history was considered.

The first steps toward a historical society in Orange Park began on July 4, 2002, when Earl Harrington, a life-long resident of Orange Park and a former mayor of the Town, approached Carolyn Clark, another long-time resident, to discuss the idea. Both had warm memories of the Clarke family and knew the formation of a historical society could provide a purpose for the old house and that would help ensure it remained a cherished fixture in Orange Park for many years to come.



Harrington and Clark discussed the idea of a historical society with other residents of the town and a movement was started. In early 2003, approximately 50 residents met at the Clarke House along with representatives of the Clay County Historical Society and Middleburg Historical Museum for the purpose of organizing a local historical society.

With momentum building and positive action being taken to move forward with a historical society, the Town began preparations to begin improvements to the Clarke House.

On March 1, 2003, 20 residents met at Town Hall to mark the first meeting of the Historical Society of Orange Park. Carolyn Clark was elected President with Art Hall, serving as Vice President, Sarah Bedsole serving as Secretary and Cindy Clark serving as Treasurer. Bylaws were soon established, and the group was incorporated in May 2003. Regular meetings began at the Clarke House that included programs of local historical interest for all that wished to attend.

**Organizational Meeting of the Historical Society of Orange Park  
March 1, 2003**



L-R: John Nelson, Earl Harrington, Claude Bass,  
Wayne Spivey



L-R: Ken Study, Mary Ann Study, Billie Weaver, Sarah  
Bedsole



L-R: Billie Weaver, Sarah Bedsole, Mary Webb, Cindy  
Clark



L-R: Faye Irvin, Marge Fachko

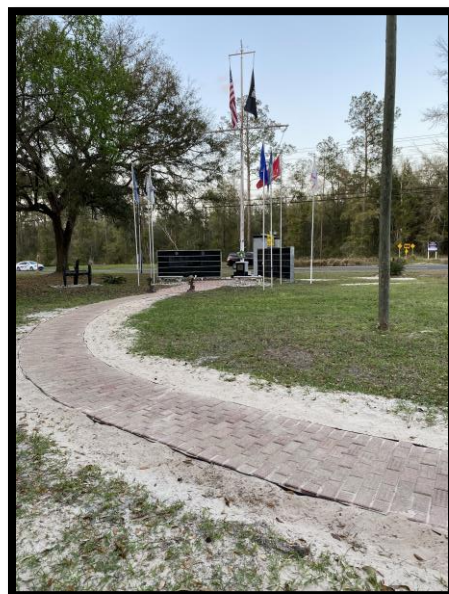
As we celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it's nice to consider the work the Historical Society has done to research, preserve and share the unique history of Orange Park. Our affiliation with the Clarke House has given it a new purpose as a repository for Orange Park's history and a link to the early days of the community. However, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the Clarke House's role in the formation of the Historical Society. The relationship between the house and the Society has afforded many the opportunity to learn about our town's history and experience a portion of the history first-hand when they visit Clarke House Park.

### **American Legion Post 250 Paver Installation**

We thought you might be interested in an update on the status of the original pavers that had been removed from the Veterans Memorial of Orange Park during the restoration project. In our newsletter last month, we had written that many of the old pavers had been loaded up by the American Legion Post 250 Riders and taken to their Post in Middleburg where they would be used to provide a paved walkway from the parking area to their Veterans Memorial.

The Post 250 Riders sponsor a Scout Troop and one of its scouts needed to select a community-based project to earn his Eagle Scout rank. That scout, Alex Riley of Ridgeview High School, selected the project to install the paved walkway. On February 20, Alex, and a group of scout and parent volunteers, began installation of the paver walkway project.

So, the pavers that were originally installed at the Orange Park Veterans Memorial 10 years ago, are now providing a handicap accessible walkway to the American Legion Post 250 Veterans Memorial, and a scout will earn his Eagle Scout rank, a top honor in scouting, by constructing the walkway as a community project for our Veterans. We will be sure to let everyone see a photo of Alex from the scout ceremony in the spring where he will receive his Eagle Scout Honors.



### **An Appreciation for the Town of Orange Park Public Works Staff**

Many of you are aware that we have a Public Works Department in the Town of Orange Park. While many of you will not come into direct contact with this group, the Society frequently requests services from this team headed up by Vada Davis.

In recent months those requests have been very frequent with issues surrounding the Clarke House and the recent refurbishment of the Veterans Memorial. The Board of Directors of the Society felt it was time to recognize this team for all they have done. They have been supportive of all requests and the properties would not look as good as they do without their efforts.

To show our appreciation, the Society, with permission from the Town, purchased a gift card from Aron's Pizza to provide lunch for the team to thank them for their efforts on our behalf.

On February 23rd, Carolyn Day of the Historical Society of Orange Park presented the gift card to Operations Superintendent, Vada Davis, to demonstrate our strong support and gratitude for all they do!



**Carolyn Clark and Vada Davis**

### **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, March 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!

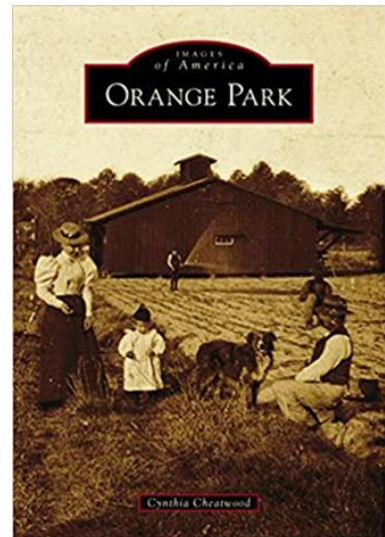


### **Images of America - Orange Park**

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](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](#)
- [The Middleburg Museum](#)
- [Historical Society of Penny Farms](#)
- [Mandarin Museum and Historical Society](#)

