



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## May 2023 Newsletter

It's hard to believe that we are already one third of the way through the year but here we are. We first want to make you aware that we have had to postpone our Quarterly Member Meeting scheduled for May 8. The meeting will now be held on June 6 at the Clarke House.

Last month, we participated in the annual Celebrate Clay event hosted by the Paul & Klare Reinhold Foundation. This event recognizes many of the non-profit organizations in Clay County that do a tremendous job serving our community in a variety of ways. This year, the Reinhold Foundation distributed \$100,000 in the form of cash awards to organizations and individuals that provide a variety of services to the citizens of Clay County. The Historical Society of Orange Park was honored to be invited to participate in this event. We applaud all of the non-profit organizations that serve our community and thank the Reinhold Foundation for their support of these organizations.

This month's newsletter features information about our upcoming meeting and a copy of our May Facebook Post celebrating the Society's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Also included is a special article contributed by Melanie Tharp on the life of her father, Art Hall, that you are sure to enjoy!

Please remember the Clarke House will be open the second Sunday of the month, May 14, from 2 PM to 4 PM. We invite you to stop by for a visit. Consider bringing friend to enjoy a quiet afternoon. Don't forget that May 14 is Mother's Day! Consider a visit to the Clarke House after you take Mom to lunch.

### Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
May 14, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
May 29, 2023	11:00 AM- 12:00 PM	Memorial Day Ceremony	Veterans Memorial
June 6, 2023	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	HSOP Quarterly Meeting	Clarke House
June 11, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
July 9, 2023	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
August 7, 2023	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	HSOP Quarterly Meeting	Orange Park Library

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

### **June Member Meeting – Orange Park Memories, The 1960's**

Due to unforeseen circumstances, our Quarterly Member Meeting, scheduled for May 8 at the Orange Park Library, had to be postponed. The meeting has been rescheduled for 5:30 PM, Tuesday, June 6 at the Clarke House located at 1039 Kingsley Avenue. Our featured speaker will be Mr. Eugene Nix. Eugene will share his recollections of growing up in Orange Park in the 1960's. The 1960's were a



time of transition for Orange Park. In many ways it was still a small town where children could roam freely and traffic was not an issue but outside forces were driving growth in the area, changing the character of the town in the process. We look forward to seeing you on June 6.

### **Facebook Post: May: 1950s**

The Historical Society of Orange Park is celebrating 20 years of history in our town by posting monthly Facebook messages throughout 2023 to highlight the town's history, decade by decade. Look for these each 3rd day of the month. Following is this month's post:

By the 1950s, Orange Park had a reputation as the bedroom community of Jacksonville, with over 2600 residents by 1960. Small hotels popped up on what is now Park Ave. Dr. Marcus Bergh opened the Pural Medical Center that would serve the town for 40 years. St. Johns Country Day School was started with first classes held in the old Orange Park Normal School buildings. Madeline Moore started the Clothes Closet of Orange Park, which is still helping the community today. At the Yerkes Primate Research Center, Keith and Kathy Hayes raised Viki, the chimpanzee (as a human) on Clarke Park property bringing Life Magazine to town for a spread. Clay County celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1958 with a parade in Green Cove Springs. Orange Park was growing up. The Garden Club of Orange Park became officially "Federated" the same year.





### **Orange Park Memories**

This month, we are pleased to share a special article on the life of a founding member and past President of the Historical Society of Orange Park, Mr. Arthur Lane Hall. Art, a native of Orange Park, devoted a good portion of his life to military service and the aviation industry and was instrumental in building our organization in its early years. The Society honors and remembers Art by presenting the Art Hall Award each year at the Clay County History Day competition for an outstanding student project focusing on military or aviation history.

#### **Art Hall, His Circle of Life**

**By Melanie Hall Tharp**

**(with collaboration from her brothers)**

Returning from a supply run to Czechoslovakia, the engine of our C-47 caught fire. The co-pilot and myself (the flight engineer) were ordered to bail out by the pilot. I hoped the dark waters of the Mediterranean's Bay of Haifa would be warm because I knew it was going to be a struggle to get out my 'chute harness and my boots. As my parachute steadily drifted down to the water, I should have been hastily forming a plan, but I just couldn't get this song out of my head!

*Oh, why did I join the Air Corps? Mother, dear mother knew best.  
Here as I lie 'neath the wreckage, a Fortress all over my chest.*

As I began to swim, I asked myself the question, "why *did* I join the Air Force?" Well, it was inevitable. When I was about 10, in the field across Hwy 17 from what is now NAS Jax, a pilot

was forced to make an emergency landing. Curiosity caused a lot of people including me to go see the flying machine. It was seeing that plane and pilot in all his gear that made Aviation my dream. So, in 1943, a few months shy of graduation from Deland High School, I signed up for flight training in the USAAF. I wanted to pilot an A-20, a new medium fighter-bomber. But being young and dashing, a fellow trainee pilot and I played at "strafing" a train and throwing oranges at the engineer, washing me straight into Aircraftman/Engine and Gunnery school.

*If ever you lose an engine and don't know which way to turn.*

*Just reach right up on the dashboard push the button marked spin, crash, and burn.*

Thinking of Evie and my new son Mike back home kept me company while I swam. After 3 years in Air Force flight and technical schools, and flying some coastal patrols along the Atlantic, I got my separation papers at Camp Blanding. I left the service with certificates in Aircraft Mechanics, and Aircraft Engine & Instrument Specialist. Soon after I used my GI Bill to attend Cal-Aero Technical Institute in Glendale, California. It was there I met a lovely young woman who would change my life.

While attending school I was also employed for various periods of time doing flight maintenance with several companies; Lockheed Aircraft Services, Eagle Air Freight, both in Burbank, and Aviation Maintenance in Van Nuys. This was not the only way I supplemented my income. Many an evening and weekends were spent in local lounges, bars, and bowling alleys, where I would sing for tips or free drinks for my buddies and me. It was in one such bowling alley that I met Evelyn.

She lived in Burbank working as a Medical Laboratory and X-ray Technician, a career that served her well for over 40 years. In the evenings, she and her girl friends would come to the bowling alley for fun and socializing. If your lanes weren't ready, you could hang out in the lounge, have a drink and chat. That was one of the places I sang and as fate would have it, a buddy of mine knew a girl friend of hers and we were introduced. I had enrolled in Cal-Aero in January of 1947 and by August we were married.

I departed California, November 1948 for Israel, leaving behind my wife and new son. I was hired by American Consolidated, an organization with links to American Zionists to send financial and technical aid to the new Israeli Nation after their War of Independence from British Mandate; and consequently their larger conflict with the Arab Nations.

Like many young veterans at the time, I had a new family, we needed money, I felt the cause was just, and I loved adventure. I recognized and accepted the risk and for 11 months I was supporting the 69<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron, "The Hammers". I was one of the many "Mahal", non-Jewish voluntaries that shared my military flight training, mechanic skills and knowledge of varied aircraft, including the B-17 and C-47, to help create the fledgling Israeli Air Force.



**Art (L) and members of his flight crew in Israel**



**Art (R) with his friend and fellow flight engineer/mechanic, Ken, in Israel**

When we decided I would come to Israel, Evie decided that she was not staying in Burbank alone. She said she wanted an adventure too. So, one month after I left for Israel, she and Mike took flight to Orange City, FL to stay with my foster mother. I had lived with my foster parents, whom I affectionately called Uncle Tom and Aunt Berta, in the house on the corner of Plainfield and Hurley Street in Orange Park since mid-elementary school. They divorced shortly before I graduated junior high and Uncle Tom moved to Jacksonville. Aunt Berta wanted to make a new start, she happened to have a long-time lady friend in Orange City, and I didn't want to attend Clay High so we moved to Orange City, bought a house and I worked a few jobs and attended Deland High.

I don't know how long or far I swam, treaded water, and floated. I know my muscles and spirit were exhausted and no rescue was in sight. When I could swim no more, I made my peace with the Lord and told him to "just take me". I relaxed my body, letting it sink, and discovered I was in hip deep water. When I returned to base, I learned the co-pilot had hit the beach and broken an ankle. The pilot stayed with the plane and managed a landing. My time in Israel was filled with hard work, danger & risk, camaraderie, amazing scenery, visits to ancient and biblical sites and the meeting of a very determined group of people.



**Art with Aunt Berta**

I returned to Florida, to my wife and child, in October of 1949. Evelyn had been working almost the whole time I was gone. She never had trouble finding a job; there was always a hospital, clinic, or Doctor's office that needed her skills. Glad to be home and back together, we took a few days to visit family and friends. Now with some money in our pockets and high hopes, we packed the car and leisurely cruised cross-country back to California, where the aircraft industry was booming. I mailed out resumes and worked a few months as a flight line mechanic at Flying Tiger Lines while waiting for the offers of employment to pour in.

By February 1951 we had arrived in Fort Worth, Texas employed by Central Airlines and by July had switched companies, now working for General Dynamics Corporation, Convair Division. For eighteen years we lived and flourished; acquired a home in the suburbs, births of another son and a daughter, attended church as well as worked and played hard in the growing metropolis of Fort Worth-Dallas.

My employment with Convair began with a year as field and service mechanic. Then I filled the position of Flight Engineer in the Division Flight Depart. During this time, I also obtained my Commercial Pilot's Certificate and acquired an additional position as Co-pilot of the Division's executive aircraft, a few times rubbing shoulders with aviation names like Yeager, Crossfield and Cochran. I was directly involved in flight operations on both production and Flight Testing Programs associated with the development of new jet aircraft or jet aircraft systems. These Test Programs included assignments with other aircraft companies both at the home division and off-site, testing planes in New Mexico and Pensacola, Florida. I've had grease under my nails, fumes in my lungs, and ink stains from the paper work on my hands from the B17 to the big B-36, fast ones like the B-58 Hustler to the F-111 Swing Wing Fighter and many more in between. In my years at General Dynamics, I accumulated in excess of 2,800 flight hours on various types of aircraft.



Art, Evie and Mike



Convair B-58

As the years passed the family got restless, the job more stressful, economic and political changes affected the aircraft industry and we were all ready for a new adventure. So, in 1969, we sold out lock, stock and barrel and moved to a 200-acre farm we had started rebuilding from scratch 7 years earlier, in Central Arkansas. We raised cattle, pigs, soybeans, hay and even dabbled in

bee keeping. Life was “honey” sweet with plenty of time for hunting, fishing, swimming at the creek, and Airshows.

Our children grew, got married and had kids of their own. Mike served in the Navy and was away into an aviation career of his own. Chuck returned from the Marines, and with Melanie and her husband Jim, the only true farm boy among us, began to run the day-to-day operations of the farm.

Evie worked at the Medical Center in Searcy, about 25 miles from the farm. That’s where we had to go to shop, see a doctor, or even a movie and as good as life was on the farm the drive was wearing her down. My love of aviation never really waned, so when the opportunity in 1980 came up to be a 50% owner and operator of Flight Maintenance Inc. at the Searcy Municipal Airport, we jumped at it. There I got my hands greasy again with light and medium aircraft maintenance, repair and operations. I co-managed the Searcy Airport, was a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) and Charter pilot. Eventually we left the farm and the kids traveled new roads.

When I got the news that an old flight buddy was terminally ill in the hospital in Pensacola, I flew down to spend time with him. Being so close, I later took the opportunity to visit the old home places on Hurley Street in Orange Park and possibly see old friends still in the area. In 1983, three years after that visit, we got a phone call from my childhood friend, Evangeline Morris.

My father, Charles Claud Hall, had built our family home on Hurley in 1927. My parents divorced shortly after the birth of my sister, Freya, in 1928. My Mother Bessie left and took the two girls from a previous marriage, but left Freya and me behind. My grandmother, Mariah Hall, moved in with us and soon after Dad had a new wife. By 1935, two more half-sisters were born, there was a second divorce, my grandmother had passed away, and Dad was gone most of the time. My little sister, Freya, was placed in an orphanage and I went to live with my foster family, the Johns, next door.

I’m telling you all this because that phone call that came from Evangeline was an inquiry from her about buying my family home back, which she had purchased in 1937. Now, I might have been born with sand between my toes, but my dream of retirement was settling out west somewhere in the mountains, or maybe like Ruidoso, NM. However, it turns out that while my adventure with The Hammers in Israel was unfolding, Evelyn’s adventure had seeded a deep love of Florida in her and she put “The Hammer” down! Needless to say in 1987, we retired back to the old family home on Hurley Street.

I had circled back to Florida and was not really thrilled with living in Orange Park again. Although my parents had long passed, there was still pent-up anger and hurt in me from my childhood events. The relationship I had and didn’t have with them, and the rejection by my mother when she left. Bessie remarried, had four more children, and never told my half siblings that I even existed. I always told myself, “I didn’t care and it didn’t matter”. I was content enough with the incredible luck or maybe divine intervention, to have been reunited with Freya years earlier in

Fort Worth. Evelyn had called the phone company to have a phone line installed in our new house. The operator recognized my name, and after a few more personal questions, Freya told Evie who she was. Freya was living not too far from us while her husband attended seminary school. We have shared our lives ever since.

We spent time rejuvenating and updating the old house and yard. Once that was done a bit of boredom and a little financial need set in. The thought of planes spreading their wings was back in my head and soon I was working as an A&P Mechanic and CFI at Shields Aviation in Northeast Jacksonville. In the meantime, Mel and Jim decided to move their family to Florida as well; they bought the property across the street from us and built their home. An added bonus and joy for us.

After a few years with Shields, I looked for closer employment and was able to obtain the same position at NAS Jax Flying Club. I met great people, worked on their planes, and taught more students how to fly. A job I truly enjoyed. After the events of 9/11, changes in procedures and protocols for security eventually slowed the traffic coming through the flying club and the added factor of my age helped me decide to retire once more. As fate would have it I was not done yet. A year later I was offered an adjunct teaching position at the newly formed Aviation Center of Excellence (ACE) through FCCJ located at Cecil Field. One year in the classroom and I decided that 60 years in the field of Aviation was enough.



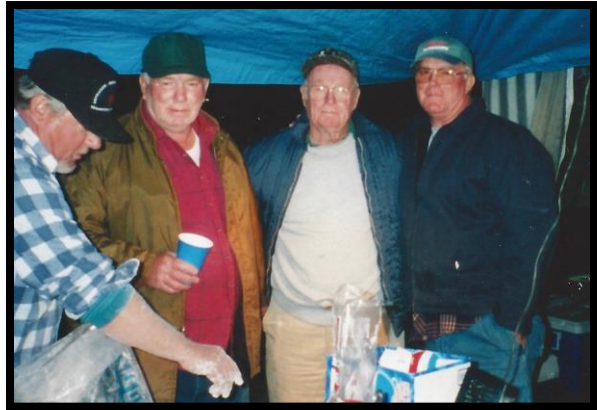
Art at the FCCJ Aviation Center of Excellence

### Epilogue

Our Dad passed in 2008; I can honestly say living in Orange Park had given him much joy. The circle Mom initiated proved to be Dad's *Greatest Blessing*. Being back here gave him the opportunity our mom knew he emotionally needed; a chance for him to get to know *his* family. Once they met, we had regular family gatherings; all of us were amazed at how many characteristics and similar interests they shared. His brothers had annual weeklong fishing trips and Dad and Jim were eagerly welcomed into the fold. There was heartfelt storytelling and tears with hugs that brought release and soothed a heart. He quickly came to love his extended family and they loved him back.



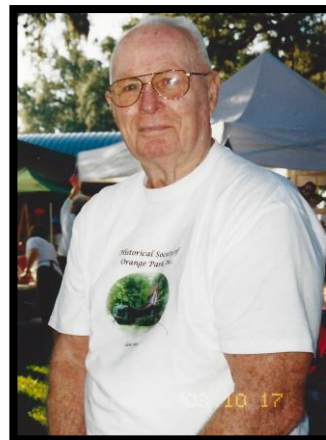
Sharing the places and stories of his childhood about the river, O.P. Elementary, and the dog tracks with his grandkids and us also proved to be cathartic for him. Mom and Dad joined the Historical Society of Orange Park, where he loved skipping down memory lane after being reconnected with childhood friends. Dad also made new friends at the meetings who encouraged him to get involved in the Society and his town. The task of restoring Souter Cemetery where many of his early pioneer family rest, although never completed due to his passing, somehow helped him to be restored himself. Through all these experiences, we watched his repressed anger and hurt lift and fly into the wild blue yonder and heal his Soul.



**Art and his brothers**



**2003 HSOP President Carolyn Clark and Vice President Art Hall**



**Arthur Lane Hall**

Arthur Lane Hall truly did complete a full circle in his life. His funeral service was held in the Orange Park Presbyterian Church; less than a block from the upstairs apartment of the old Evans house on Kingsley Avenue where he was born.

*\*Although a portion of this story was written in first person, it is compiled from true events, documentation, observations, and the stories our parents would tell.*

*Excerpts of the poem/song are from Fortress Blues, Unknown Author.*

## **Clarke House Tours**



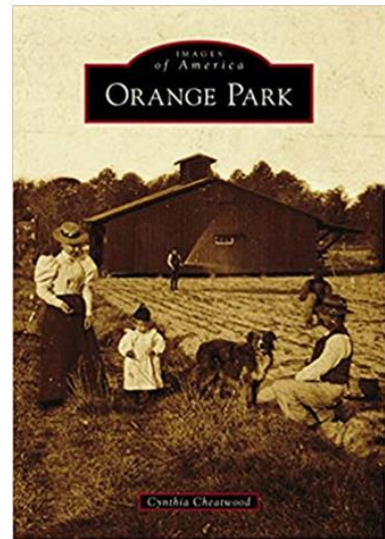
The Clarke House is open for tours on the second Sunday of each month from 2 PM to 4 PM. This month, the house will be open to visitors on May 14. If you have not yet visited the house or, if it has just been a while, we invite you to stop by to look around. The slower pace of a Sunday afternoon provides 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](#)

