



The Historical Society of Orange Park

May 2024 Newsletter

The month of May means that it is time for our second quarterly member meeting of the year. Our next meeting will be held on Monday, May 6 at the Orange Park Library. It will feature a presentation on Orange Park resident and Vietnam hero, George CD Allen. More information on our meeting can be found on Page 2 of this newsletter.

May also marks the 123rd anniversary of the Great Jacksonville Fire. At midday on May 3, 1901, stray sparks from a nearby chimney ignited a flame in dried moss at a local mattress factory. Windy conditions spread the flames to nearby structures. The fire spread quickly through the many wooden buildings in the downtown area moving from Northwest to southeast. By the time the fire was brought under control 8 hours later, it had burned



all the way to the St. Johns River leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. The fire burned 146 city blocks and destroyed over 2,300 buildings, leaving almost 10,000 residents homeless. Stephen Butcher, Superintendent of the Orange Park Normal and Industrial School, and his wife, Sybil,



made a trip to Jacksonville by riverboat not long after the fire and took the accompanying photos. They show the complete devastation caused by the fire. It took many years for the city to rebuild but some of the new structures have become architectural landmarks that still serve the city well to this day.

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
May 6, 2024	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
May 19, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 9, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 12, 2024	8:30 AM – 4:00 PM	Society Outing	Kingsley Plantation
July 14, 2024	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

May Quarterly Meeting: George CD Allen

Please join us at 5:30 PM, Monday, May 6 at the Orange Park Library, 2024 Plainfield Avenue in Orange Park, for our next quarterly member meeting. George Allen will share the story of his father, George CD Allen, an Orange Park resident who was highly decorated for bravery while serving with the US Army in the Vietnam War. Please join us to hear the story of this remarkable man.

May is for Memories. Join the Historical Society of Orange Park as we remember the heroism of Orange Park's

Sgt. George C. Allen
U.S. Army - Vietnam



Distinguished Service Cross
Silver Star
3 Bronze Stars
Army Commendation Medal
5 Purple Hearts

Join us at 5:30 pm on May 6, 2024, at the Orange Park branch library, 2054 Plainfield Ave, Orange Park, FL 32073 as George Allen, son of the soldier shares his father's jaw-dropping story.

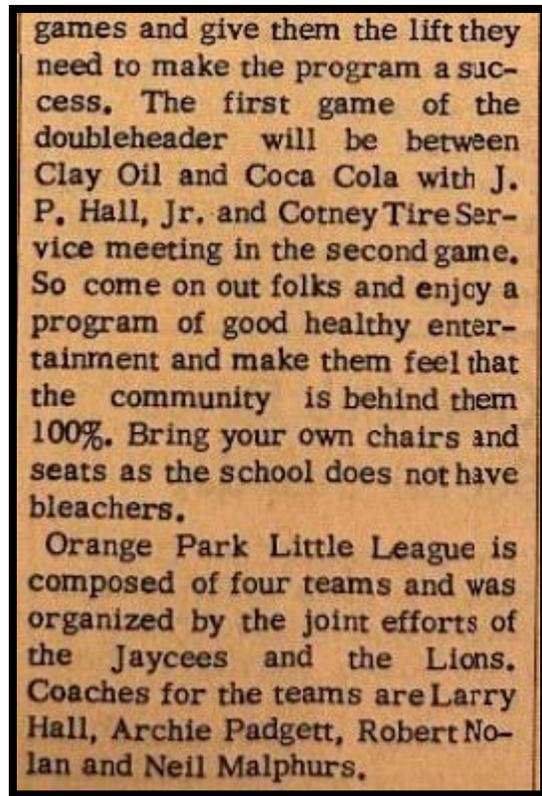
Orange Park Memories

Play ball! The Historical Society of Orange Park is sharing vintage news stories each month of 2024, clipped from *The Breeze* newspaper (1959 to 1971). Check back each First-of-the-Month for a flashback to earlier days. This month's article reminds us of pre-Internet days when local ball games were community events. Wax nostalgic with this 1963 article.



**Orange Park
Little League
Opening Set**

Orange Park Area Little League Baseball Teams will be proudly wearing their "new" uniforms at the opening doubleheader this Saturday afternoon, starting at 1:00 p.m. at the Elementary School Baseball Diamond. Mayor Walter Odum will be on hand to throw out the first ball. We hope the residents will support these Little Leaguers by attending the



games and give them the lift they need to make the program a success. The first game of the doubleheader will be between Clay Oil and Coca Cola with J. P. Hall, Jr. and Cotney Tire Service meeting in the second game. So come on out folks and enjoy a program of good healthy entertainment and make them feel that the community is behind them 100%. Bring your own chairs and seats as the school does not have bleachers.

Orange Park Little League is composed of four teams and was organized by the joint efforts of the Jaycees and the Lions. Coaches for the teams are Larry Hall, Archie Padgett, Robert Nolan and Neil Malphurs.

Florida History Day Competition

There will be a group of students traveling from Clay County to Tallahassee May 5-7, to compete in the state version of the national history competition called National History Day. The Society is helping this happen with a donation toward trip expenses for the six students from Orange Park Junior High and Grace Episcopal Day School. This year's theme, "Turning Points in History" will be demonstrated by two individual exhibits, one group website and an individual documentary. Students will represent the county along with students for 29 other counties. Developing a love of history at an early age can help us pass the baton in the future.

Outing to Kingsley Plantation

Wednesday, June 12th.



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 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 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is free.



Celebrate Clay



On Tuesday, April 23, the Society was invited to attend the annual Celebrate Clay event presented by the Paul & Klare Reinhold Foundation. Celebrate Clay recognizes the outstanding community service provided by the many hard-working, dedicated non-profit organizations within Clay County. This year, \$100,000 was distributed among 47 organizations and individuals that made a big difference in the lives of Clay County citizens. We are proud to announce that the Historical Society of Orange Park was the recipient of a \$1,000 award for our work in the community. We offer our sincere appreciation to the Reinhold Foundation for this recognition and affirmation.

It is humbling to attend this event when you learn of all the good things being done for the citizens of Clay County. We are grateful for the opportunity to be included and attend the event. We are also grateful to the Reinhold Foundation for their generosity in recognizing and assisting those that work so hard to help others.



Corporate Support

We wish to acknowledge two local businesses for their support of our historical society. The first is McDonald's of Orange Park, who joined our Society as a member at the Carrie Clarke level. We also acknowledge Dairy Queen of Orange Park for their generous donation to our Society. Both businesses have been in Orange Park for many years, serving the community and becoming local landmarks. We are proud to have their support and ask that our members continue to support them as well.

Support the Businesses that Support Us



Dairy Queen, 610 Kingsley Avenue, Orange Park

McDonald's, 428 Park Avenue & 372 Blanding Blvd., Orange Park

In Memorium – Barbara Davidson

Last month, we said goodbye to Society member and long-time friend, Barbara Davidson. Barbara passed away at her Holly Point Road home on April 11 at the age of 98. Barbara lived a good, full life. She resided in Orange Park for many years and watched it grow from a small, quiet town to a bustling suburban community. She was truly a link to our past.

Barbara was born in Jacksonville and later moved to Orange Park with her husband George, who preceded her in death. Barbara was very involved in town affairs. She served at various times on the Orange Park Police Pension Board, the Code Enforcement Board, the Environment and Quality Board, the Planning and Zoning Committee and the General Government Committee. She was also a fixture at Town Council meetings where her excellent memory for details was on display. No one needed to refer to the minutes of past meetings when Barbara was there. If they did, it was simply for confirmation. Barbara was no-nonsense and direct in her assessments and believed in adherence to the rules. This attitude might have been fostered by her 49 years of service at the Naval Air Station. Rules are there for a reason and, if followed, they keep us out of trouble.

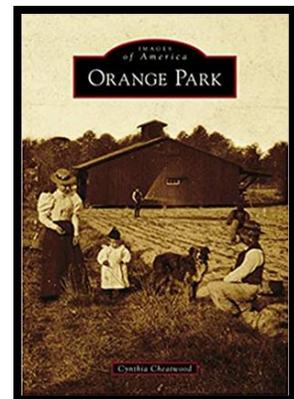
Barbara was also a faithful friend. She was available to lend an ear and offer friendly advice to those enduring difficult times. Barbara blessed us by speaking at our annual Veterans Day Ceremony in 2018. She discussed the origins of Veterans Day with a mix of pertinent information and wry humor that resulted in a very engaging presentation.

We will miss Barbara's wit and style. She was truly a part of Orange Park and we are the lesser without her.



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.



Middleburg Museum

A SPECIAL PRESENTATION
ABOUT

**NORMAN
STUDIOS
SILENT FILM
MUSEUM**

BY



BARBARA WINGO
President & Curator



DEVAN LESLEY
Media & Publicity
Director



Thursday, May 16, 2024
6:30 p.m.
Middleburg Museum Meeting
at the Middleburg Civic Center
2102 Palmetto St., Middleburg, FL 32068

Richard Norman was born
in Middleburg, Florida in 1891.
He became a silent filmmaker
in the 1920s and started Norman Studios
in Jacksonville, Florida. He is best known for his
movie called "The Flying Ace."

Clarke House Tours



So that we may celebrate Mother's Day with our families, the monthly open house at the historic Clarke House will be held a week later than usual on Sunday, May 19, 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 May 19 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, 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](#)

