



The Historical Society of Orange Park

June 2025 Newsletter

Summer is upon us. It is officially the season of hammocks, shade trees and cold drinks. To complement your summer activities this month, the Historical Society is featuring its monthly Open House at the Clarke House on June 8, the Jacksonville History Fair on June 14 and our next Quarterly Member Meeting on June 24. Please plan to join us and bring a friend! You can learn more about these events in the newsletter.

The upcoming holidays this month include Flag Day and the 250th birthday of the US Army on June 14 followed by Father's Day on Sunday, June 15. Make time to celebrate!

Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
June 8, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
June 14, 2025	10:00 AM - 3:00 PM	Jacksonville History Fair	Jacksonville History Center 314 Palmetto St., Jacksonville, FL
June 24, 2025	5:30 PM – 7:00 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
July 13, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
August 10, 2025	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

June Quarterly Meeting: Celebrating Clay County Scout Camps

Please join us at our next Quarterly Meeting on June 24, 2025, 5:30 PM at the Orange Park Branch Library, 2054 Plainfield Ave in Orange Park. Historical Society of Orange Park President, Cynthia Cheatwood, will present the history of our local Boy Scout camp, Camp Echockotee, and our local Girl Scout camp, Camp Chowenwaw, using vintage photos and personal narratives that span decades. These two camps hosted multiple generations of scouts and left them with lifelong memories. Start your summer with memories of camp!



Were you a scout? Please bring any special memories or scout souvenirs that you would like to share. Bring a friend. The program is free and open to the public.

Orange Park Memories

The Historical Society is highlighting Orange Park businesses each month of 2025, sharing stories each month that feature one very old and one more familiar business in the town. This month we feature Hotel Marion and Club Continental.

Hotel Marion was developed from the ruins of another hotel in the earliest days of the town. It had 65 rooms, a golf course, sulfur water baths and welcoming gingerbread trimmed verandas that wrapped two floors. It sat at the corner of Kingsley and River Road and provided entertainment and employment to most Orange Park residents at one time or another.

Club Continental, originally called Mira Rio, was built 1922-1923 as the private residence of Caleb and Elinor Johnson, relatives of Karrie Johnson Ferguson, owner of Winterbourne. Johnson had put over \$2 million (\$38 million in today's money) into the project. The property became Club Continental in the 1960s when Jon Masee, grandson of Caleb and Elinor Johnson, and his wife, Frica, converted the property to a more public space.



Hotel Marion



Club Continental

3rd Annual Jacksonville History Fair

On Saturday, June 14, from 10 AM to 3 PM, the Jacksonville History Center will conduct its 3rd annual Jacksonville History Fair at 314 Palmetto Street in Jacksonville. Representatives from area historical societies, including HSOP, will be ready to answer your questions about local history and the services their organizations provide. This event is a great resource to obtain information and an effective way to meet other individuals interested in local history. Tickets are \$10 per person, which includes a raffle ticket. Free parking is available.

Opportuni-Tea

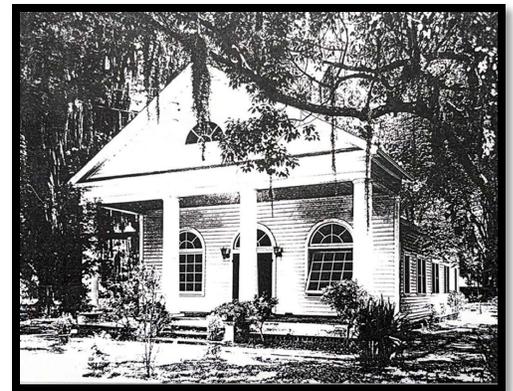
On Thursday, May 8, the Society hosted a members-only Tea at the Clarke House. The purpose of the tea was to afford our members a chance to get together, reconnect and share stories in a relaxed setting. By all accounts, the Tea was a success. In addition to long overdue conversations, attendees enjoyed a variety of teas and an assortment of delicious treats. Guests also participated in a trivia contest featuring questions about tea, a fitting topic for the occasion. Our thanks to Cindy Cheatwood for organizing this event and preparing the tea and

snacks. She did a tremendous job. With the response we received to this inaugural effort, we plan to make this an annual event. We look forward to gathering for tea, snacks, conversation and fun next spring!



History of First Baptist Church, by Bob Scallan

I always find before and after photos of buildings and landmarks interesting. Here, I would like to share with you the before and after photos of the First Baptist Church of Orange Park. To tell the story about this building, we must start with the history of the Clarke family that moved to Orange Park in 1912. Carrie Clarke is well known for her civic engagement and generosity. If you ever toured the Clarke House located on Kingsley Ave., you probably noticed the very large screen porch. It is well documented that Carrie would hold Sunday school classes on that porch with local children. I suspect that as Carrie's porch congregation began to grow, she eventually needed more space. I also suspect that there was probably some urging from Mr. Clarke to move the sessions elsewhere.



First Baptist Church in the 1930's

As told to me by the First Baptist Church historian, several plots of land were put up for auction by the town of Orange Park in 1930. Mrs. Clarke realized this would be a wonderful opportunity to help establish a permanent church facility and attended the auction. The lot she was interested in was located at the corners of Kingsley Ave. and Astor St. – a mere block from the St. Johns River. As the bidding was about to begin, Carrie leaned over to her friend accompanying her and asked, “How much should I bid”? The auctioneer read a description of the lot and called out, “Let the bidding begin!” Carrie shouted out, “\$1.00!!!” At this point, we are not sure why the following happened, but the auctioneer’s gavel fell, and he cried out, “Sold!” Yes, that’s correct. The lot was purchased for \$1.00. Carrie then donated it to the church.



Early Baptism in the St. Johns River

With a lot in the heart of Orange Park, the congregation began collecting sand from the river and bringing it to the lot where they made their own cement blocks, stacking them until they had enough to begin construction of the church. Eventually, the church was completed. Electricity lines had been run to Orange Park from Jacksonville only six years prior. The church paid a fee of \$45 to have the lines run to their new church building. The first utility bill was a whopping 98¢.

When members of the congregation were ready for baptism, it was only a short walk down the street in the river. (see photo)

The neighborhood was a hub of activity. Right next door to the church, the Woman’s Club building went up the same year. Across the street was the burgeoning Moosehaven. Diagonally across Kingsley Ave. from the church was Wiley’s General Store and post office. Around the corner on Astor St. was the relatively new Renaissance mansion built by Palmolive Soap Company owner Caleb Johnson, Mira Rio – now Club Continental.

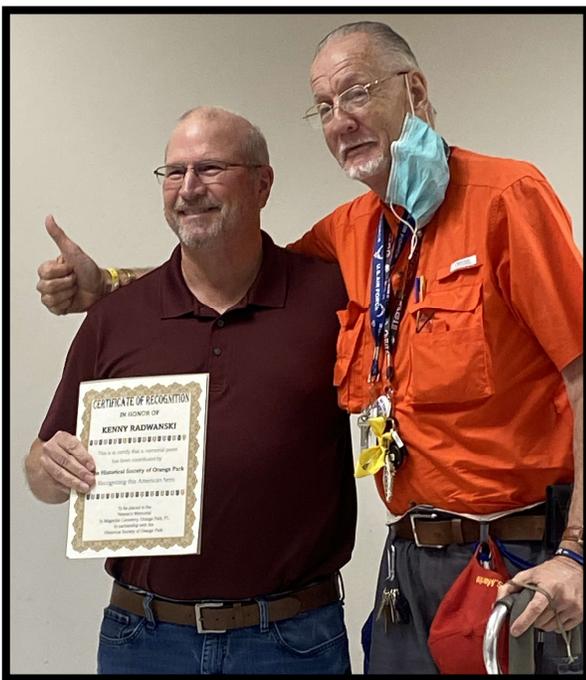
The original First Baptist Church building would serve the congregation until the early 1970’s when a larger facility was built on the corner of Kingsley Ave. and Azalea Lane – which is about 50 yards from the driveway to the Clarke house. What a coincidence that is! Maybe Carrie had something to do with procuring that location too. I can see her walking down the sidewalk from her home to church on Sunday morning,...long flowing dress, bonnet covered head, and a dozen kids in tow.



First Baptist Church of Orange Park

In Memoriam – Kenny Radwanski

Kenny Radwanski, a member and friend of our Society, passed away last month on May 3, at the age of 70. Kenny was a “people person”. He had a knack for engaging with others and was known by many in Orange Park. He loved to be involved in the life of the community and was a fixture at Town meetings. Kenny was often present at community events, visiting with everyone and sharing stories. Kenny was also generous, particularly when it came to the Historical Society. He was happy to donate to the benefit of the Society and even paid the membership dues of some of our members. He was proud of Orange Park. On several occasions he purchased copies of Cindy Cheatwood’s, *Images of America: Orange Park*, to give away to public servants, friends and sometimes, total strangers to give them an opportunity to know our town better. Kenny proudly served with the United States Air Force for eight years. During a recent renovation of the Veterans Memorial, Kenny made a donation toward the cost of the work. The Historical Society installed an inscribed paver at the memorial to acknowledge and honor Kenny’s service, a small gesture that meant a great deal to him. Life in Orange Park won’t be the same without Kenny. He will be missed.



Kenny Radwanski gives a thumbs up as he receives a certificate acknowledging his new inscribed paver at the Veterans Memorial

Veterans Memorial

Each year, we place one order for inscribed pavers to be installed at the Veterans Memorial. **The final day to place an order for an inscribed paver this year is July 31.** All pavers ordered by this date will be installed at the Veterans Memorial prior to this year’s Veterans Day Ceremony in November. Paver order forms can be found on our website, www.ophistory.org, and at the Veterans Memorial. The gift of an inscribed paver is a wonderful way to honor those who have served and share their service with the community!



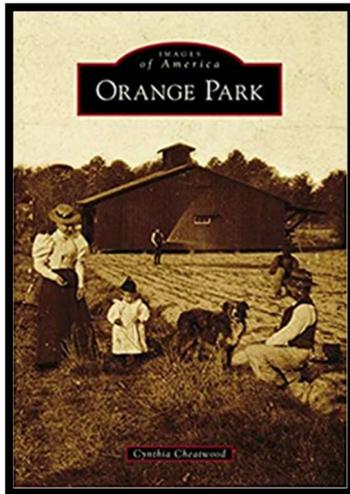
Private Guided Tours of Historic Clarke House Available

Homeschool, civic and social groups are welcome to schedule a free guided tour of the 1913 historic Clarke House. For more information, contact the Historical Society of Orange Park at info@ophistory.org. Groups will be scheduled based on the availability of guides.



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. This book shares the history of our town through archival photographs and stories collected from a variety of sources. The cost of the book is \$20 for members of our Society, \$25 for non-members and \$27 for online orders.



Clarke House Tours

The Clarke House will be open to the public for tours on Sunday afternoon, June 8 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 and make some memories of your own and feel free to share recollections that the house inspires.



Look For Us 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.

Orange Park Historic Driving Tour



Looking for somewhere to explore or something to do in Clay County? Visit the Explore Clay website, [Explore Clay County - Small Towns, Big Passions](#), for plenty of suggestions.

One of the activities is a tour of historic buildings in Orange Park. This driving tour takes you to 23 historical structures that hold positions of prominence in Orange Park's history and continue to serve today. *Please remember most locations are private residences and should be viewed from the street.*

To access the tour visit, download the Explore Clay mobile app from the Explore Clay website or by clicking: [Clay County - Mobile App](#). Once you have the app downloaded, search for the tour then dive into the rich history of Orange Park.

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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