



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## July 2026 Newsletter



This month, we celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing and adoption of our Declaration of Independence that marked the founding of the United States of America. Up to that time, there had been nothing like it. It made a statement to the world that we were all equal before the law, we would be responsible for governing ourselves and we would rise or fall on our own merits. Please take a moment to read portions of this amazing document:

### ***In Congress, July 4, 1776***

***The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America, When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.***

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*

After a long list of offenses perpetrated on the American colonies by Great Britain, the Declaration closes as follows:

*We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent*

*States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.*

The Declaration of Independence was a bold statement. It’s one thing to make a bold statement but it is quite another to enforce it. The war for independence from Great Britain that followed was long and arduous, it ebbed and flowed and turned on events both grand and small. Victory was far from certain. This Independence Day, as we rightfully and joyfully celebrate, let’s consider the fundamental truths contained in our Declaration of Independence and honor the sacrifices made by so many on behalf of this great nation over the last 250 years. **Happy Independence Day!**

This month, Sandra DiGiovanni, will host a tour of previously unmarked veterans’ graves in Magnolia Cemetery on Saturday, July 4, we will host our monthly Open House at the Clarke House on Sunday, July 12 and on Monday, July 20, Bob Scallan will lead a tour of the Riverside area to tell the story of the tragic loss of two, young P-51 pilots in 1944. More information on each of these activities is shown below.

We hope you enjoy the newsletter!

**Calendar of Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
July 4, 2026	9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Reynalder Marker Reveal	Magnolia Cemetery
July 12, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
July 20, 2026	10:00 AM – 11:30 AM	P-51 Tour	Corner of Post and King
August 3, 2026	6:00 PM – 7:00 PM	OP Library’s 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary	Orange Park Library
August 9, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
September 13, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

**Upcoming Events**

**Independence Day Veterans Tours**

The Historical Society will observe Independence Day with the dedication of five markers for veterans in Magnolia Cemetery who, to date, have not had a marker. The Society's Sandra DiGiovanni has petitioned the Veterans Administration and received the markers. A marker for a sixth veteran is still in process. Sandra will guide a walk through Magnolia Cemetery, 1040 Kingsley Ave., starting at 9 AM to present the markers and tell the stories of these veterans. We hope you can join us.

**Orange Park Library 50th Anniversary Celebration-**

Join the Historical Society at the Orange Park Branch Library on August 3rd from 6 PM -7 PM. The Orange Park Branch Library is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> year as part of the Clay County Library System. The public is invited to help celebrate. There will be multiple stations featuring the Historical Society of Orange Park, the Friends of the Library, Daughters of the American Revolution, craft stations, and more! Stop by our station as we look back with vintage photos and anecdotes. We look forward to seeing you there!



**Veterans Now Remembered**, By Sandra DiGiovanni

On Saturday, July 4 the Historical Society of Orange Park will hold a Veteran Marker reveal. Let me explain.

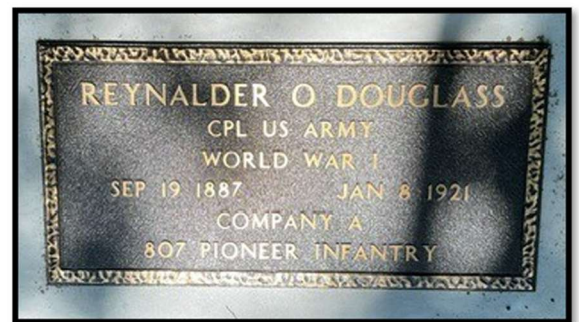
In 2022, I began the arduous job of identifying the veterans interred in Magnolia Cemetery to be able to recognize each veteran for the Wreaths Across America event in December 2022. I found myself spending many mornings in the cemetery finding military markers as well as headstones with military service proudly etched in stone. This was not an easy job and required a lot of walking and recording each veteran as he or she was identified. One veteran I could not find was Reynalder O. Douglass. Records from the book: **They are here: cemeteries of Clay County, Florida, and a brief history of Clay County and northeast Florida**, provided information regarding veterans buried in Magnolia Cemetery. Reynalder was the only one I was unable to find. I identified 175 that first year and each year more have been added.

In 2025, I was given the opportunity to explore the cemetery records held in Town Hall. This was the best resource I could have hoped for. Every day I was able to identify veterans as well as other individuals buried in Magnolia Cemetery but unmarked. Find-a-Grave, a web-based resource, was updated and family relationships expanded throughout the cemetery. This research identified 13 veterans with no markers at all. That was not acceptable. My new goal was to research each veteran's service and try to find family to apply for a military marker. Not an easy task, but by February I had sent in 6 requests for military markers.

What better day to reveal the first 5 markers than our 250<sup>th</sup> birthday. This will not be a large event, but a small tribute to these fine veterans, so long overdue, to recognize each one's service and maybe a story or two as the Historical Society loves stories.

Back to Reynalder, I still do not have a location for his burial, but it is almost certain he was buried in "Potter's Field" located at the rear of the cemetery. He died in 1921 and many of the African American burials were held in this section of the cemetery. His family has agreed to place his marker in front of his sister's (Lenetta Douglass Walker) grave. My research has located a number of Reynalder's family buried in the cemetery; a sister, a brother, nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews keeping him company all these years. So please, if you have a few minutes at 9 AM on Saturday, July 4<sup>th</sup>, join us to salute these veterans.

It is hoped that by Veterans Day this year, all 13 of these veterans will have markers in place.



**Honor a Veteran—Leave a Lasting Legacy**



Now is a wonderful time to order a legacy paver in honor of a veteran who has touched your life. Each engraved paver will become a permanent part of the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery, preserving their service and sacrifice for generations to come. This is the last month to purchase a paver that will be included in this year’s order. Consider placing a tribute that tells their story and ensures their legacy is remembered. Order forms are available at the Veterans memorial or via our website at

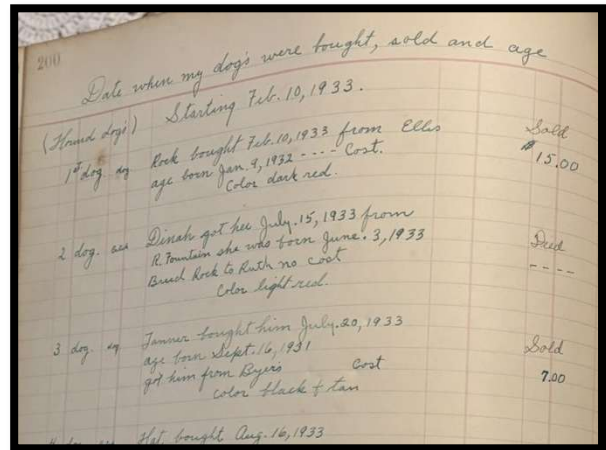
<https://ophistory.org/veterans-memorial>. Please note that all engraved pavers ordered by July 31 will be installed prior to this year’s Veterans Day Ceremony.

**Horton Family Donates Family Journal**

On June 17th, Lance Belyea and his sister, Denise Johnson donated a vintage hand-written journal to the Society. It had been the property of Henry Alton “Harry” Horton, who included a record of his dogs in its pages along with the original records tracing back to Pennsylvania. The family promises to send the Society images of the Horton clan for our records. Andrew Belyea and his wife, Bethany, joined the conversation of Orange Park history around the Clarke House table. Stay tuned for more to come!



**Belyea Family with the Horton Journal**

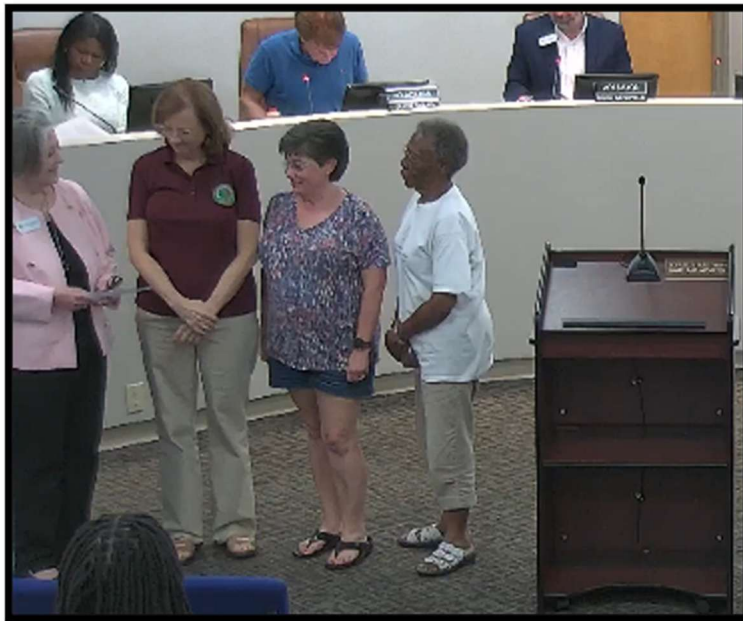


**Horton Journal**

**Northeast Florida League of Cities**

In early April, Mayor-Elect Winnette Sandlin contacted the Society about the possibility of qualifying for a \$500.00 donation from the Northeast Florida League of Cities. The organization is a lobbying and resource association for municipalities in the Northeast Florida region, serving as the local affiliate of the Florida League of Cities (FLC). It is based in Palatka, FL and operates under the motto “Together We Achieve More”. Winette serves on their board and explained that they encourage nonprofit organizations to serve by offering grants. She encouraged the Society to apply. We did and were awarded the grant! We are very grateful to the organization and appreciate their recognition that our activities are all done for the good of the community.

On June 2nd, the presentation was made by Mayor Sandlin at the Town Council meeting. Cindy Cheatwood was there to accept, joined by members Melissa Harris and Betty Demmons.



**Mayor Winette Sandlin presents a check from the NE Florida League of Cities to HSOP members Cindy Cheatwood, Melissa Harris and Betty Demmons.**

### **Tour to Commemorate Loss of Two P-51 Warplanes and their Pilots, by Bob Scallan**

On July 20, 1944, a tragic event unfolded that would leave an indelible mark on the small community of Riverside. Two P-51 Mustang fighter planes, known for their speed and agility during World War II, attempted to buzz the childhood home of one of the pilots.

Both pilots were young and full of promise, representing the hopes and aspirations of their community. As the planes approached, they came in too low, resulting in a catastrophic sequence of events. Trees were clipped, both aircraft crashed, homes and garages were destroyed, and the pilots killed.

The community was left in a state of disbelief and mourning as residents grappled with the loss of not just two promising lives but also the devastation that followed.

Such tragedies remind us of the fragility of life and how quickly joy can turn into sorrow.

On Monday, July 20, members of the Historical Society of Orange Park are invited to join Society Vice President Bob Scallan for a walking tour of Riverside to hear the compelling story of how two 2nd Lieutenants disobeyed orders and flew 180 miles off course to meet their untimely deaths. For more information or to make reservations, please contact Bob as indicated in the following graphic.



★ ★ ★ **WWII** ★ ★ ★  
**P-51 AIRPLANE CRASH**  
**WALKING HISTORY TOUR**

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ORANGE PARK - MEMBERS ONLY

— **82<sup>ND</sup> ANNIVERSARY!** —  
**JULY 20<sup>TH</sup> AT 10:00 AM**  
 Meet at the corner of  
**Post & King Streets, Riverside**  
**Street Parking Available**

**HEAR THE COMPELLING STORY OF  
 THEIR FATAL CRASH ON POST STREET!**

**FOR INFO & RESERVATIONS CALL OR TEXT:**  
 ★ **239-340-1292** • EMAIL:  
**BSCALLAN@COMCAST.NET**

**OPTIONAL LUNCH AT LOCAL RESTAURANT**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF OP MEMBERS ONLY**

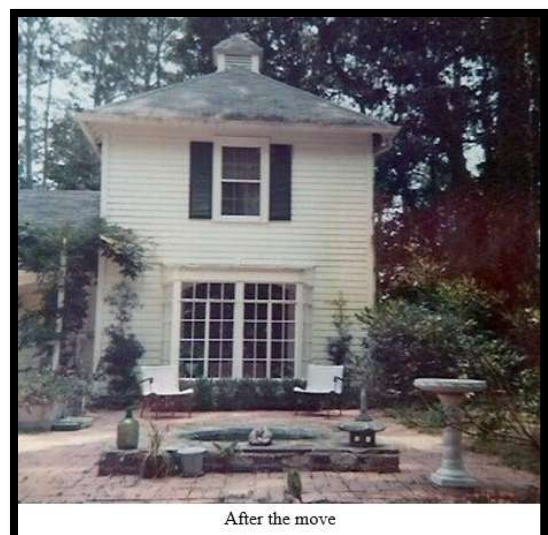
### **Orange Park Memories, By Cindy Cheatwood**

This month, we feature the Miller-Halligan House, located at 154 Stiles Ave. This unique Colonial Revival home was originally part of the Buckman estate in the Riverside area of Jacksonville. Architectural evidence and comparisons with similar buildings of the style indicate that the building was constructed about 1895.

The Buckman family was prominent in state and local politics. Thomas Buckman, the original owner of the house, served as Clerk of the Circuit Court for Duval County for twenty years. Thomas' son, Henry Holland Buckman, Sr., built and operated the Florida, Atlantic and Gulf Central Railroad between Jacksonville and Tallahassee. He also served in the State Legislature and was the author of the Buckman Bill of 1905, which consolidated various publicly funded colleges into what are known today at the University of Florida,

Florida State University and Florida A&M University. Henry Holland Buckman, Jr. is also the namesake of the Buckman Bridge that connects Orange Park and Mandarin.

The Buckman house was expanded about 1925 to include a carriage and guest house. By 1951, Courtland Buckman, Thomas Buckman's youngest son and owner of the house, was interested in selling the carriage house. He found a willing buyer in Ivan Huron Smith, a founding partner in the Reynolds Smith and Hills architectural firm of Jacksonville. Mr. Smith wanted the carriage house for his widowed sister-in-law, Vernice Miller. He arranged to have the house moved. Great pains were taken to transport what had once been the Carriage House of the Buckman estate of Riverside in Jacksonville, Florida to Orange Park's Stiles Avenue. The building was moved in three sections down the St. John's River. After placement at its new location, Mr. Smith supervised its remodeling



Mrs. Vernice Miller lived there for 35 years until her death in 1986. when it was purchased by Bill and Effie Halligan. Bill Halligan was a New Yorker and a US Army veteran of World War II who enlisted at age 17 by changing his age on his registration card. He had 5 daughters with wife, Martha Jane who died in 1983. He later married Ester Mae Young who also had 5 children. They were married 34 years before his death in 2020.



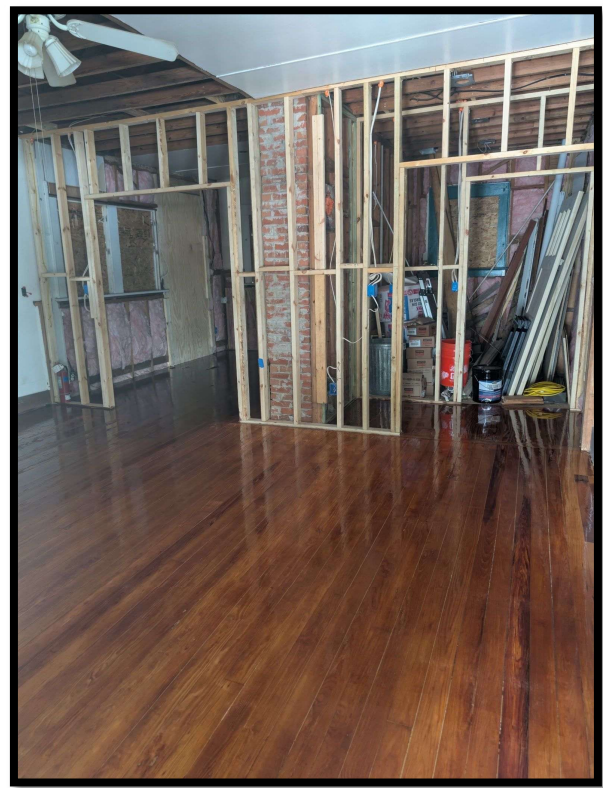
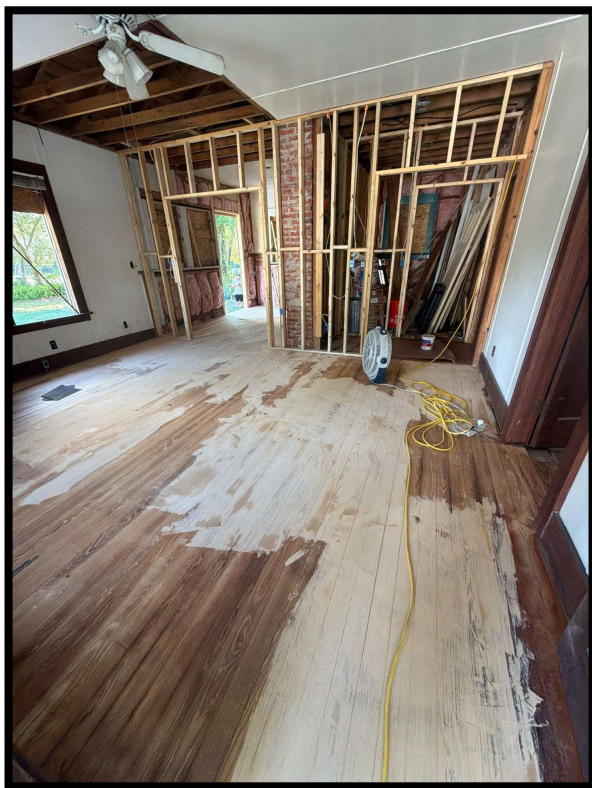
**Buckman-Miller House**

**Green House (Clarke Cottage) Renovation Underway, By Cindy Cheatwood**

Much has been done at the cottage. Progress is remarkable.

- The crawl space below the house has been cleaned and both Girder Beams have been replaced.
- Lattice at entry porch has been replaced after many years being absent.
- Windows and front door have been removed and are being restored.
- A new concrete sidewalk has been constructed.
- Flooring in the kitchen has been installed.
- Plumbing pipes have been replaced for the kitchen and bathroom.
- Insulation has been added.
- The bathroom wall has been reframed to accommodate ADA guidelines.

Stay tuned for more in the next newsletter!



## Look For Us Online

Look for the Historical Society of Orange Park online via our website, [www.ophistory.org](http://www.ophistory.org), our [Instagram](#) page or our [Facebook](#) page. Both sources provide updates on society news and activities.

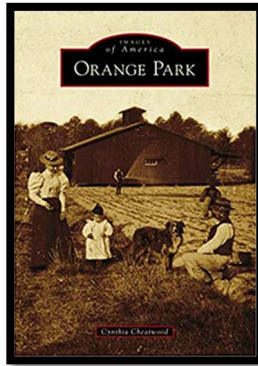
## Got pics?

The Society is looking for photographs to add to our resources. If you have long-time-ago images of people and/or places in Orange Park, please share them. In this increasingly visual world, there is a lot to learn from these glimpses of our past. You can share them through email at [info@ophistory.org](mailto:info@ophistory.org) or through mail at P. O. Box 08, Orange Park, 32067. Originals will be returned after the Society makes a scan.



## 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

Historic Clarke House Tours are held the second Sunday of each month from 2 PM to 4 PM. A quiet Sunday afternoon is the perfect time for a leisurely tour of the house, both up- and downstairs. It's free and guided by members of the Historical Society of Orange Park. Private Guided Tours are available to homeschool, civic and social groups! To schedule a free guided tour, contact the Historical Society of Orange Park at [info@ophistory.org](mailto:info@ophistory.org). Groups will be scheduled based on the availability of guides.



### Upcoming Open House Dates:

- July 12th - Free old-fashioned paddle fans included
- August 9 Free popsicles to celebrate Back-to-School
- September 13- Grandparents Day- what a great way to step back in time with the grands! Clarke House will bring back warm memories of a time gone by.

### **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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