



# The Historical Society of Orange Park

## December 2025 Newsletter

December is a month of celebration so let's celebrate by enjoying the events listed below!

On Sunday, December 7 at 2 PM in Magnolia Cemetery, the Society will host a ceremony honoring Arthur Gilbert, a survivor of the sinking of the USS Arizona during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The following Saturday, December 13, features the annual Wreaths Across America ceremony at Magnolia Cemetery. Also, that same weekend, we celebrate Hometown Holiday at Clarke House Park on the evenings of December 13 and 14.

Later this month, we celebrate Christmas! We wish each of you a happy and blessed holiday. May you experience the joy of good times with friends and family. We hope your holiday is full of love and laughter!

We hope you enjoy the newsletter.



### Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
December 7, 2025	2:00 PM – 3:00 PM	Arthur Gilbert Ceremony	Magnolia Cemetery
December 13, 2025	11:45 AM – 1:00 PM	Wreaths Across America	Veterans Memorial
December 13 & 14, 2025	5:00 PM – 9:00 PM	Hometown Holiday in the Park	Clarke House Park
January 11, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House
January 20, 2026	6:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Quarterly Member Meeting	Orange Park Library
February 8, 2026	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Open House	Clarke House

### Orange Park Memories

Each first-of-the-month of 2025 the Society has highlighted two businesses that left their mark on the town. In this, our final post for this year, we recognize the Huntley Brothers and Dr. Kyle Abshire, Optometrist.

Louis and William Huntley, Clay County natives were prosperous businessmen starting in the 1940s. The brothers developed several businesses including a convenience store chain with over 340 locations at one

time. The brothers were also active in community government and corporate affairs for the region for decades.

Dr. Kyle Abshire (<https://youtu.be/t4VF4dv7ZMA>) started his optometry practice in Orange Park, his family's vacation area as a child, in 1968. The practice outgrew its location at 418 Kingsley Avenue and after several remodels, moved to Park Ave. Dr. James Hoffman joined the practice in 1981. Eventually their dream office opened at 405 Park Ave. He also opened a sister office on Blanding Blvd. In 2018, Dr. Abshire retired after practicing for 50 years. Please share your memories of either of these businesses with us at [info@ophistory.org](mailto:info@ophistory.org).



**Huntley's Grocery Store**



**The Offices of Drs. Abshire and Hoffman**

### **Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day**

Join The Historical Society of Orange Park and American Legion Post #250 as we honor USS Arizona survivor, Arthur Gilbert, on December 7, 2025, at 2 PM inside Magnolia Cemetery, 1040 Kingsley Avenue, Orange Park. Parking is at the First Baptist Church of Orange Park, 1140 Kingsley Avenue. We will gather to hear Gilbert's story and give him the military service he never received when he died in 1973. As we unveil his new bronze military marker, we will honor all who were there that fateful day.

Commander Jessica Moore, American Legion Dept. of Florida will be on hand with a message honoring Pearl Harbor's heroes. Commander Douglas Pistorius, US Navy, will offer the keynote address. The NAS Jax Honor Guard will present the colors and our friends at American Legion #250, Steve Kast, Mike Pavese, Mary "Teri" Tarrant, Danny "Doc" Tarrant, Dick Rowe, along with Commander Pistorius, will conduct the formal presentation of the flag to the Gilbert family.



As we gather, we honor all those at Pearl Harbor in 1941 and offer overdue military recognition for Arthur Barnes Gilbert whose son still lives in Orange Park in the home Arthur provided the family. All are welcome.

## **Hometown Holiday**

Join us for the 13th annual Hometown Holiday event at Clarke House Park on Saturday, December 13 and Sunday, December 14, from 5 PM to 9 PM. Enjoy holiday decorations at the Clarke House, live music, food vendors, photos with Santa, a Christmas village for shopping, holiday movies outdoors, and festive trail rides. Admission and many activities are free! All ages are welcome.

Parking is across from the park at First Baptist Church of Orange Park, with officers assisting crossing Kingsley Avenue. Limited handicap parking is available within the park.



## **Help Needed for Hometown Holiday!!!**

On December 13 and 14 we will host hundreds of people through the Clarke House. Hometown Holiday will run from 5 PM until 9 PM both nights. Members of the Board will be there both nights, but more helpers are needed. There is no need to dress up or play a character role unless you choose to do those things.

We typically have a steady stream of visitors. An additional person or two is most helpful to assist our guests is most helpful. You can engage the public with things or topics you find interesting. Most guests are nostalgic and love to hear about the Clarke family.

You do not have to be there all evening. Any amount of time you can spare will be appreciated. If you can help, please contact Cindy Cheatwood at [ckcheatwood@hotmail.com](mailto:ckcheatwood@hotmail.com) or 904.707.0822. If there is no answer, please leave a message.

## **Quarterly Member Meeting**

Please mark your calendars and plan to join us at 6 PM, Tuesday, January 20, at the Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Avenue, for our next Quarterly Member Meeting. Sandra DiGiovanni will present stories about historic homes in Orange Park dating from the 1880's through the 1950's. Every home has a unique story to tell. We look forward to seeing you there!



**Lynch House**



**Via Tisdale Home**



## **Veterans Day Ceremony**

On Tuesday, November 11, the Historical Society of Orange Park, in cooperation with the Town of Orange Park, hosted the annual Veterans Day Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial at Magnolia Cemetery. The ceremony was well-attended despite the cold temperatures, which speaks well of the devotion this community has for its veterans.

The ceremony was opened in prayer by Chaplain Kenny Greenway of American Legion Post #250 followed by the presentation of the colors by Boy Scout Troop 25 and a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem by the Orange Park High School Chorus, *Pure Harmony*.



**American Legion Post #250 Patriot Guard**



**Chaplain Kenny Greenway**



**Boy Scout Troop 25**



**Orange Park High School Chorus, *Pure Harmony***

Remarks were provided by Orange Park Police Chief, Randy Case and Carol Westerman, Regent of the Sophia Fleming Chapter of the DAR. Our Guest Speaker was Dr. Victor Maquera, a local neurologist with Neuro-Tek. Dr. Maquera shared his story of coming to this country from South America as a young man and earning his medical degree. He served in the US Navy and obtained Undersea Medicine Training, with



special expertise in hyperbaric, diving and submarine service. He taught Diving Medicine at the US Navy Dive School in Panama City, Florida and served around the world in the submarine fleet, which allowed him to bring his expertise to the unique challenges encountered by that branch of the service.

The Veterans Day program also featured two selections by our old friends, the First Coast Highlanders, and a performance of America the Beautiful, by Pure Harmony.



**First Coast Highlanders**



**Orange Park Police Chief, Randy Case**



**DAR Chapter Regent, Carol Westerman**



**Dr. Victor Macquera**

Another highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of awards for the annual Essay Contest and the reading of the winning essays. The winners of the essay contest were as follows:

### **Elementary Division**

Topic: What is Veterans Day?

**Winner:**        **Mason DeLeon**, 6th Grade, Lake Asbury Jr. High, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

### **Honorable Mention**

**Caleb Lowery**, 6th Grade, Lake Asbury Jr. High, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

**Juliana Reynolds**, 6th Grade, Lake Asbury Jr. High, Teacher: Wendi Stephens

**Junior High Division**

Topic: Why is Veteran's Day Necessary?

**Winner:**        **Riley Jennings**, 7th Grade, Lakeside Jr. High, Teacher: David Magpiong

**Honorable Mention**

**Raymond Sherrier**, 7th Grade, Lakeside Jr. High, Teacher: David Magpiong

**Paisyn Finch**, 8th Grade, Keystone Heights Jr-Sr. High, Teacher: April Goolsby

**Senior High Division**

Topic: How Do Veterans Serve Our Country?

**Winner:**        **John Liam Leoncio**, 10th Grade, Oakleaf High, Teacher: Gregory A. Borcharding

Students presenting the winning essays received a plaque and a cash prize. Students meriting Honorable Mention received a certificate and a gift card. Congratulations to these students for their outstanding essays! We offer our sincere appreciation to all students that put forth the time and effort to research and prepare an essay for this contest. The winning essays have been posted to our website, <https://ophistory.org/veterans-memorial>.

Riley Jennings, the author of the winning Junior High essay, deserves special recognition. Riley donated his cash prize of \$75 to Lakeside Junior High School to support their food drive that will help those in need. We commend Riley for his generosity, concern and community awareness!



**Essay Contest Winners**



**Riley Jennings presents his prize money to Lakeside Junior High Principal, Dustin James**



Following closing remarks by Cindy Cheatwood, the Veterans Day ceremony was closed in prayer by Chaplain Greenway and the playing of Taps by Cindy Anderson, of American Legion Post #250.

This year's ceremony was to feature a flyover by the Dreamland Squadron. Unfortunately, high winds above 1,000 feet made conditions unsafe to fly. We are grateful to the members of the Dreamland Squadron for their willingness to participate in the ceremony and look forward to their flyover at next year's ceremony.

We give our sincere thanks to the Patriot Guard, American Legion Post #250 Riders, The Garden Club of Orange Park, First Baptist Church of Orange Park, Sophia Fleming Chapter NSDAR, Orange Park Woman's Club, Orange Park Lions Club, the town of Orange Park, Girl Scout Troop 31020 and Boy Scout Troop 25, the Orange Park High School Chorus, *Pure Harmony*, and teacher Michelle Duchemin. We also offer our heartfelt thanks to Mr. Bob Scallan for his efforts in organizing this year's ceremony.

### **Veterans' Corner: Wreaths Across America**

Magnolia Cemetery is home to 265 veterans as of September 2025. This month we are highlighting all our veterans by reminding everyone about our Wreaths Across America event being held this year on Saturday, December 13 at 11:45 AM.

This is our fourth year honoring our veterans in Magnolia & Moosehaven Cemeteries. In 2024, across 4,909 participating locations nationwide, millions of volunteers — a third of whom were children — remembered our nation's heroes as they said their names out loud, with the placement of over three million sponsored veterans' wreaths. Everyone should be proud to be included in this yearly event.

I would like to list the groups of young people that participate every year and make our day at Magnolia & Moosehaven Cemeteries so meaningful.

Boy Scout Troop 25  
Cub Scout Pack 25

Black Creek Young Marines  
Girl Scout Troop 31020

These four groups have had representatives every year since 2022. Once again, this year they will be taking part in our ceremony as well as placing wreaths. We are proud to add a new group of young people to our ensemble. The 4-H Oakleaf Trailblazers will be joining us to make sure every veteran has a wreath and has his or her name spoken.

If you would like to come out and help honor our veterans, feel free to attend. Parking, as always, is courtesy of First Baptist Church of Orange Park.



**Veteran's Corner: Louis Lafayette Huntley**

Magnolia Cemetery is home to 265 veterans as of September 2025. This month we are highlighting Louis Lafayette Huntley.

Louis Huntley was born in Clay County and graduated from Clay High School in 1945. He was a sergeant in the U.S. Army from 1946-47 and a major in the Florida National Guard from 1951-1966. Mr. Huntley earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Florida in 1950. In 1966 after transferring to the U.S. Army Reserves, he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1973 and retired in 1991 at the rank of colonel. Truly a lifetime commitment to serving in the United States Army.

During this time Mr. Huntley was dedicated to his community, serving as a Clay County Commissioner in 1962 and a state representative from 1964-1966. In 1966 he and his brother founded Huntley Jiffy Stores, Inc., which grew to 340 stores in Southeast Georgia and Florida. He and his brother William operated the chain until 1990, though Louis continued to serve on the Board of Directors through 1993.

Some of Mr. Huntley's service included Chairman of the Clay County Fair Association, Director of the Penney Farms Retirement Community, several Boy Scout committees, and active membership in the Orange Park Rotary Club where he was recognized as a Paul Harris Fellow and had perfect attendance.

As a business leader, he served as the president of the Clay County Chamber of Commerce and was a member in both the Clay and Duval Chambers. He served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of South Lubes, Inc., and served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Marketmasters of the Southeast, Inc., a real estate development, sales and leasing company. This company is still owned and operated by his son, Ward Huntley.

Mr. Huntley was active in business and community service his entire life. His commitment to Orange Park and Clay County is remarkable. Mr. Huntley's legacy of service continues through his family.

**Board Vacancies for 2026**

The Board of Directors of the Historical Society of Orange Park has vacancies that need to be filled. Members are being asked to consider participation in the leadership of our Society, which has been gaining momentum over the past few years. The two vacant positions are Secretary and Membership Chair.

The Secretary records and keeps the minutes of all meetings of the membership. He or she furnishes a copy of the minutes to the President after each meeting. The Secretary also has a vote on board decisions made for the good of the Society.

The Membership Chair is responsible for the membership drive, conducted in the fall each year; they keep an accurate list of names of members with date of joining; and notify members when their dues are delinquent. The campaign for 2026 is already well under way, having been initiated early by the current Membership Chair, Sandra DiGiovanni, who will assist the new chairman as needed.



If you see a fit for yourself in either of these positions, please contact Cindy Cheatwood, [ckcheatwood@hotmail.com](mailto:ckcheatwood@hotmail.com) or 904.707.0822. There are exciting plans already forming for 2026 and this is a great time to join the board!

### **Early Bird Special on Annual Memberships**

As part of our membership drive for 2026, the Historical Society is offering a reduced rate for annual family memberships **through the end of this year**. Our Early Bird rates are as follows:

- Senior Family Membership \$15
- Family Membership \$30

We are also offering our Clarke House and Veterans Memorial wood Christmas ornaments, normally \$10 each, for the reduced rate of 2 for \$15. Take advantage of these prices while they last. The sale ends December 31!



### **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.



### **Links to Local History**

**For more events and activities related to local history, please visit the following:**

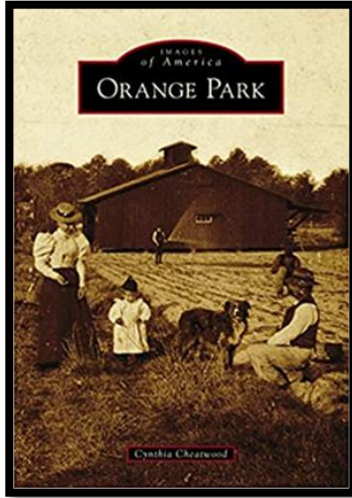
- [Clay County Historical Society](#)
- [Middleburg Museum](#)
- [Historical Society of Penny Farms](#)
- [Mandarin Museum and Historical Society](#)
- [Keystone Heights Heritage Commission](#)
- [Clay County Archives](#)

## 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.

## 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

Our regular Open House will coincide with Hometown Holiday this month.

Please join us Saturday, December 13 and Sunday December 14 from 5 PM to 9 PM to tour the Clarke House. The Clarke House, built in 1912, served as the family home for William and Carrie Clarke for many years. It features hardwood floors, plaster 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.



## Please support our Corporate Sponsors



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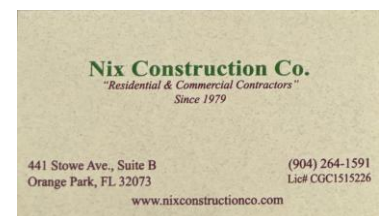
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