

Celebrate Clay History

Exploring the county's rich history in a fun, educational way

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – The Clay County Clerk and Comptroller's Office's history archives office, the Clay County Hospitality and Tourism and the Board of County Commissioners will join Clay Today in celebrating the county's history in May.

The month will start with a simple – and fun – assignment by traveling to the different sites throughout the spring and summer.

And at each stop, residents are encouraged to cross off the site on a BINGO card that lists each area of interest.

No. 1

Check out the locations on the card and pick those you'll enjoy visiting

No. 2

Once you've gone, mark it off on your BINGO card

No. 3

Win by being the first family member or friend to connect all locations in a row, and in the process win bragging rights.

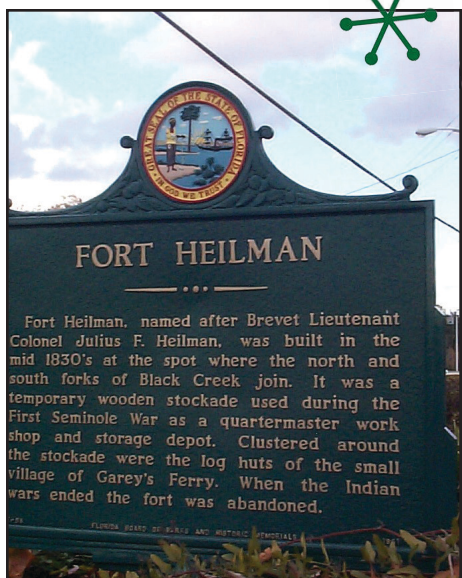
You can visit these local historic sites for either no cost or very low cost – they are just a short drive from any Clay County home. Pop in/pop out, or make a full day of it as you absorb not only the area's unique history but also enjoy public parks, swimming holes, hiking trails, local eats and unique shops near each site. True stories about our county's history-making people, places and events will surprise and entertain you.



Historic Middleburg

Middleburg's Historic Main Street Fort Heileman Site History Museum

The oldest continuously used road in Clay County and in Middleburg even before area became known as Middleburg. Maps from the 1830's illustrate the early road as a dirt path cutting through the



Fort Heileman

wilderness which later morphed into a military road during the Second Seminole War, cutting across Black Creek with the use of a ferry on its way to Jacksonville. Main Street is the site of the oldest home in Clay County (Clark-Chalker house dates back to 1830) among many others that are worth viewing by car, bike or on foot. The Middleburg History Museum is located at nearby 3912 Section St. and welcomes visitors on Sundays from 2-4 p.m.



Black Creek Boat Ramp

Middleburg's Black Creek Nature Walk, Playground & Boat Ramp Park

Main street ends at the Main Street Boat Ramp, site of the 1830's Garey's Ferry as well as the site of the Second Seminole War's Fort Heileman. Nestled in the trees is a boardwalk through the woods out to Black Creek. Nearby, MSGT. John E. Hayes Memorial Park provides picnic tables and a small playground.



Fleming Island Black Creek Park & Trail

Fleming Island Black Creek Park & Bike Trail

A maintained bike trail through conservation lands on Black Creek, this trail covers ground that was once a British land grant. In 1767 Sir Richard Russell, Lord Buckworth, was granted 10,000 acres bounding east on the St. Johns River and south on Black Creek. British Governor James Grant personally selected the site for Lord Buckworth, an absentee planter in East Florida who never actually saw his beautiful property.

Gold Head State Park Keystone Heights

One of Florida's first state parks, Gold Head Branch became part of Florida's state park system in 1935. The initial property was donated by Martin J. "Mike" Roess (pronounced "Race") and developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).



Gold Head State Park

The CCC was launched in 1933 under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to combat unemployment during the Great Depression. In 1935, 25 seasoned craftsmen from Company 2444 were sent to the Gold Head site and were joined by hundreds of CCC youth. Together, they established Camp SP-5 where they planted trees, cleared campsite areas, built roads and constructed many of the buildings still in use today at the park. Swimming, hiking, wildlife viewing and camping are all available. The state park was officially dedicated on April 15, 1939. For years the park was simply known as Gold Head Branch, until 1966 when the Florida Board of Parks and Historical Monuments changed the name to honor the late Mike Reynolds.



US Navy Mothball Fleet

Reynolds Park Yacht Center Lee Field, US Navy Mothball Fleet & Space Shuttle Fuel Tank

Formerly a Naval flight training facility known as Lee Field (or NAS Green Cove Springs) during WWII, its most famous flight student was JFK's older brother Joseph Kennedy and its most famous instructor was Ed McMahon. After the war, it became the Mothball Fleet wherein hun-



Space Shuttle Fuel Tank

dreds of Navy ships were cleaned, maintained and stored. Now the site of Reynolds Park Yacht Center, a drive through this interesting site while “googling” photos from its WWII era fame online proves entertaining. The modern-day piers and ships in dock can also be viewed from nearby Spring Park and city pier. <http://www.rpyc.info/about.html>.



Clay History Museum and Railroad Depot

Clay History Museum & Railroad Depot



Featuring a former train depot now positioned at the Historic Triangle site, exhibits include railroad memorabilia, an old time country kitchen and country store displays. Operated by the Clay County Historical Society at 915 Walnut Street, the museum is open on Sundays from 2pm-5pm. Outdoor exhibits (red railcar and railroad depot building) can be viewed any time and are great spots for outdoor photos.



Historic Triangle, Old Jail

Historic Triangle, Old Jail and Archives, 1890 Courthouse, TAPS Military Monument

The Historic Triangle site forms a triangle as the grounds sit inside three crossroads - Walnut, Gratio and Ferris Streets in Green Cove Springs, and is home to the 1890 Courthouse, 1894 Old Jail, TAPS Military Monument and County Archives. The land was donated to the county by the Borden Family of the Borden Condensed Milk fame in the 1880's. Clerk of Court personnel serve as the County Archivist and await your visit Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm. Tours of the grounds and

buildings are available – call ahead! Phone Archives at (904) 371-0027. <http://archives.clayclerk.com/>.



Clarke House Park

Clarke House Park and Playground

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the house was originally built in the early 1900's by William Clarke and his wife Carrie. It was a working farm with acres of productive pecan trees. Several outbuildings nearby were leased as housing for the scientists from the Yerkes Primate Laboratory (“monkey farm”). The home is now the meeting place of the Orange Park Historical Society and other facilities include a large playground, sand volleyball court, nature trails, gardens, lake, pavilions, grills, restrooms and numerous beautiful oak trees. <https://www.townoforangepark.com/departments/economic-community-development/parks-recreation/clarke-house-park/>.



Camp Chowenwaw

Camp Chowenwaw, Tree Houses, Historic Girl Scout Cabin, Pool, Nature Trails & Dock

This county-owned park on Fleming Island started out as a Girl Scout camp in 1933. The county purchased the park in 2006. Famous for its tree house campsites and stunning views of Black Creek. There is also a pool and walking trails. <https://www.claycountygov.com/community/parks-and-recreation/camp-chowenwaw-park>.



Orange Park's River Road

Orange Park's River Road, Kingsley East River Overlook

This riverfront overlook and adjoining mile-long walkway feature views of the

great St. Johns River and nearby Moosehaven, a retirement community founded in 1922 by the Loyal Order of the Moose. Moosehaven is the former site of Laurel Grove, Zephaniah and Ana Kingsley's plantation. At the end of Kingsley Avenue where the walkway begins there is a historical marker describing the torpedo warfare that took place on the St. Johns River during the Civil War. The Maple Leaf, an underwater archeological site on the opposite bank of the river from this point, was sunk by Joshua D. O'Hearn, Clay County's second sheriff, in 1864. At the same site of the marker, one can imagine the 1,000-foot pier that once stretched out into the river.

<https://www.townoforangepark.com/departments/economic-community-development/parks-recreation/kingsley-east-river-overlook/>



Cecil Field National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum

Branan Field OLF (Oakleaf), Cecil Field National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum (Jacksonville)

Branan Field Road was named after Branan Field, the Navy airfield constructed during WWII. The Navy bought the land from the Branan Family during WWII. It was a large hexagonal shaped field with crisscrossing runways. In the mid-to-late 1940's the original Blue Angels squadron used the landing field for practice. Today, the landing field runways are built over by Oakleaf area subdivisions and community activity fields. Further north, at Cecil Field, is the National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum. Located on 26-acres in Northeast Florida at the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field, Master Jet Base (1941-1999), we now know the location as Cecil Commerce Center in Duval County. The new memorial to honor POW/MIA military is under construction there.

Neptune Park and Historical Marker (Fleming Island)

This new athletic field and park is located off Thunderbolt Road on Fleming Island. The park was named in honor of the crew of a Navy P2V2 Neptune aircraft



Neptune Park

that crashed near that location on June 14, 1951, killing seven of the nine crew members on board.

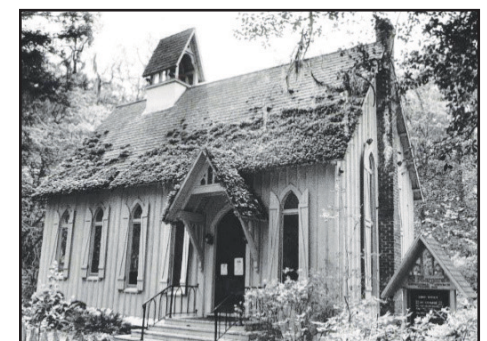
The crew was on a training mission originating from NAS Jacksonville in preparation for the Korean War. After a fire broke out onboard, the crew attempted an emergency landing at the Fleming Island Naval Outlying Field. The park honoring the memory of these veterans has amenities that include three ball fields, covered dugouts, backstop fences, bleachers, a concession stand, and restrooms. <https://www.claycountygov.com/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/1534/1021>.



Camp Blanding Military Museum & Airplane Garden

Camp Blanding Military Museum & Airplane Garden

Camp Blanding was built in 1939 as a National Guard training facility but, when WWII occurred, the US Army took it over. At any given time, several divisions were in training at the camp. It also was a prisoner of war camp for German submariner prisoners. After the war, the camp reverted to the Florida National Guard. Kingsley Lake is the camp's most beautiful asset at 3 miles wide and almost a perfect circle. The camp is named after WWII general Albert H. Blanding, as in Blanding Boulevard (State Road 21) and is located south of Middleburg. <https://campblandingmuseum.org/>.



St. Margaret's Church at Hibernia

St. Margaret's Church at Hibernia

Hibernia was the name of the Fleming Family plantation. Hibernia Road turns into Old Church Road and leads travelers directly to St. Margaret's Church, built by Margaret Fleming in 1875. Margaret's funeral was the first one held in the church. Fleming's Island, as originally called, is a Spanish land grant given to George Fleming. The church is of carpenter gothic style and has beautiful stained glass windows. The adjacent family cemetery holds generations of Flemings and other early settlers of our county. <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1451633/hibernia-cemetery>.

Clay History

BINGO



JC Penney Statue

Penney Farms Museum and JC Penney Statue

Visit the little community of Penny Farms, the community initially created by JC Penney as a utopian agricultural experiment. Its most famous resident was Meinhardt Raabe, one of the Munchkins from the Wizard of Oz, an iconic movie still today. Although JC Penney never lived there himself, the community honors his legacy through a statue at Town Hall and Museum.

<https://historicalsocietyofpenneyfarms.org/penney-farms-historic-museum/>



Keystone Heights Beach

Keystone Heights Beach, Pavilion and Playground

Set on the shores of Lake Geneva is the beach pavilion where WWII GI's and local girls once danced the night away. There is a tree-lined park with a playground and picnic tables available for public use.














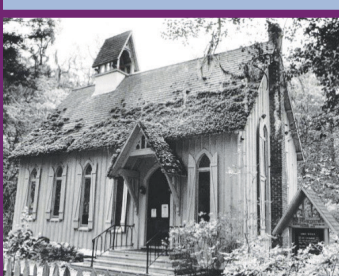






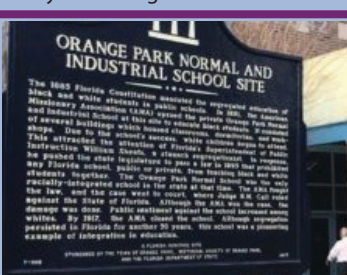
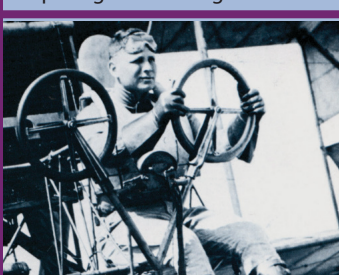
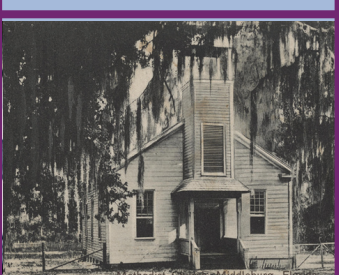

<https://www.keystoneheights.us/parksrec/page/keystone-beachgeneva-jungle>



Keystone Heights Natural Park

Keystone Inn and Natural Park

The Inn was opened in 1924 just as John Lawrence was developing Keystone Heights. Located at 555 Lawrence Boulevard, a historical marker details the importance of the once-famous inn in the growth of the area as well as the bonding of the early community there. <https://www.keystoneheights.us/parksrec/page/keystone-heights-natural-park>

			
○ Historic Middleburg	○ Black Creek Boat Ramp	○ Fleming Island Black Creek	○ Gold Head State Park
			
○ US Navy Mothball Fleet	○ Clay History Museum & Depot	○ Historic Triangle	○ Clarke House Park
			
○ Camp Chowenwaw	○ Orange Park River Road	○ Cecil Field Memorial & Museum	○ Neptune Park
			
○ Camp Blanding Museum	○ St. Margarets Church	○ Statue of JC Penney	○ Keystone Heights Beach
			
○ Keystone Heights Natural Park	○ Spriong Park Fishing Pier	○ Ronnie Van Zant Park	○ North Florida Military Museum
			
○ Orange Park Normal School	○ Roy Geiger Historical Marker	○ Methodist Church Middleburg	○ Bayard Conservation Area

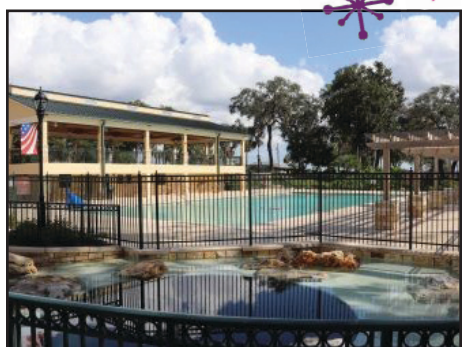


Spring Park Fishing Pier

Spring Park, Pool and Splash Pad, Playground and Fishing Pier

Located in Green Cove Springs behind city hall, this spring has been a tourist hotspot since the 1870's when the original snowbirds (Northern tourists) began visiting Florida. City Hall sits on the site of the Clarendon Hotel (1871), then the Qui Si Sana Hotel (1904). The city's fishing pier is in the same place as the original 1870s pier. Fun in the sun abounds at this lovely park – fishing, swimming, walking trails, playground, picnic pavilions and more.

<https://www.greencovesprings.com/maps/location/SpringPark>.



Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park



Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park

Ronnie Van Zant Memorial Park

Located in the Lake Asbury community, this park is dedicated to the memory of Lynyrd Skynyrd's founder and lead singer, Ronnie Van Zant. Ronnie and his family resided, in addition to Duval County, in Clay County and his family donated this land for the park. The frisbee golf course at the park is considered one of the best. There is a new playground and the 90-acre park also has two basketball courts, four tennis courts, one soccer field, one softball field, eight covered pavilions with picnic areas, one volleyball court, and a fishing pond with four fishing piers. There are two 34-foot by 28-foot covered pavilion for large family functions.



North Florida Military Museum

North Florida Military Museum at Reynolds Park

This museum is filled with memorabilia, artifacts and displays about the modern wars (WWII forward). Its location itself is historical as it's located at the former, WWII era Lee Field. Today, it's the site of the Military Museum of North Florida, many local industrial businesses and the storage site of a space shuttle fuel tank. <http://www.themilitarymuseumofnorthflorida.com/>



Orange Park Normal School

Orange Park Normal School, Town Hall Historical Marker

In the 1890s, Orange Park had a trailblazing de-segregated school in the middle of town. The teachers at this classical academy openly defied Florida laws against teaching black and white students together. Their trouble got them arrested but the case was later thrown out of court by Judge Rhydon Call as unconstitutional. Today, the town hall, fire department and police department buildings sit where the school campus was once located. The site is often used for festivals and farmers markets and also includes a small playground.



Jennings State Forest Walking Trails

Jennings State Forest Walking Trails

Jennings State Forest offers a unique hiking experience not commonly found in Florida. Jennings State Forest can be found in northeastern Florida in the northern section of Clay County. Constant eleva-

tion gain/loss, beautiful bluffs above Black Creek, hollows, waterfalls and much more can be found here. Enjoy hiking trails such as Fire and Water, Dunn's Farm and North Fork Black Creek, each included in the Florida Forest Service's Trailwalker Hiking Program. Convenient resting benches and wayfinding signage are common on these trails. For longer outings, try Pioneer Trail with a total length (from southern terminus to northern terminus) of approximately 10 miles.

A great place to enjoy nature and experience some history as well. Going back to the 1800's many families had homesteads there, farms and schools dotted the landscape as well. Turpentine was one of the main industries in this area and the forest provided plenty of resources and places for turpentine camps. Many of the families also had cemeteries there, one was known as "Dunn Cemetery", named after the farmer who owned the land. <https://www.fdacs.gov/Forest-Wildfire/Our-Forests/State-Forests/Jennings-State-Forest>.



General Roy E. Geiger Historical Marker

General Roy E Geiger Historical Marker

General Geiger was born and raised in Middleburg. The "Father of Marine Corps Aviation," was born on January 25, 1885, in his family home on what is now the campus of Middleburg First Baptist Church. That's where you'll find the historical marker. He served as a school teacher, principal, and lawyer. Geiger joined the Marine Corps in 1907 and was commissioned in 1909. After tours of duty in Nicaragua, Panama, and China, he became the fifth Marine Corps Aviator in 1917.

Major Geiger commanded the 1st Marine Aviation Force in France during WWI. During WWII, he commanded the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at Guadalcanal and was named Commander of Third Marine Amphibious Corps for the invasion of Guam and Okinawa. He also commanded the Tenth Army, being the only Marine to command an Army unit. He was promoted to Lieutenant General in July 1945 and was named Commander of Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. General Geiger was the most senior Marine present at the Japanese surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri in September 1945. Following his death on January 23, 1947, Geiger was promoted to four-star general by the U.S. Congress. General Geiger is the only general in the American military to be born and raised in Clay County. An icon in Marine Corps history, General Roy Geiger now rests in Arlington National Cemetery.



Middleburg Methodist Church & Cemetery

Middleburg Methodist Church and Cemetery

This church was founded in 1823 and is one of the oldest Methodist churches in Florida. The property where the historic church now stands was deeded in 1847 by John Schuefler. George Branning donated the lumber and the labor came from slaves owned by Branning and Osias Budington. The church has wide clapboards on the exterior and wide random-width tongue and groove boards on the inside. Nails were made by hand at a local blacksmith shop and can still be seen in the pews. The pews are mahogany and were finished by hand with a drawknife. The bell, hanging in the steeple, was cast in 1852. The accompanying cemetery is filled with early, pioneering Clay County citizens with names like Dillaberry, Branning, Budington, Austin, Bardin and more. The famous singer, Slim Whitman is also buried there. <https://www.middleburgumc.org/history>.



Bayard Conservation Area

Bayard Conservation Area

The St. Johns River runs broad and deep near Green Cove Springs where the Bayard Conservation area preserves and untouched Florida riverfront, bottomland, and floodplain with dense stands of bald cypress, sweet gum, and red maples. More than 15 miles of trails wander through the John P. Hall Nature Preserve portion of the conservation area. John P. Hall was Clay County's longest serving sheriff from 1929 to 1964. He was also one of the county's largest landholders and donated some of the land in the conservation area. Bank fishing, hiking, bicycling, kayaking, boating, horseback riding, geocaching, primitive camping at designated sites and wildlife viewing are all available. <https://www.sjrwmd.com/lands/recreation/bayard/>.

Let's make the Summer of 2022 your family's Summer of Clay County History BINGO! And at each stop, residents are encouraged to check out the sights, sounds, activities and nearby businesses and attractions, too. Then, mark off the site on the bingo card. There's even an online version of the card available through the county's Tourism office at exploreclay.com

