

A Short History of the Ormond Yacht Club

I. Incorporation and Early Development of Ormond

The Town of Ormond was incorporated in 1880. The first house of worship, the Ormond Union Church, was organized in 1883, and their first chapel was built on North Palmetto Street, now North Beach Street, in 1884. Early members crossed the Halifax River from the beachside by rowboat to attend services.

In 1886 the St. Johns and Halifax Railway arrived. The first bridge across the Halifax River in Ormond was built in 1887. The famous Hotel Ormond, built by John Anderson and Joseph Downing Price, opened on January 1, 1888, just to the north of the bridge on the eastern shore of the Halifax.

In 1891 the Village Improvement Association (later the Ormond Beach Women's Club) was formed by a group of women "to promote neatness and order in the village, to do whatever may lead to improve and beautify our town as a place of residence and keep it in a healthful condition". A few men joined the first year but the second year the members voted to make the VIA exclusively for women.

II. Hotel Ormond, Henry Flagler, and Tourism

On October 1, 1888, the property of the St. Johns and Halifax Railway was conveyed to the St. Johns & Halifax River Railway. Henry Flagler bought the Hotel Ormond in 1890 and expanded it to accommodate 600 guests. At the time the population of Ormond was only 239. Anderson and Price continued to manage the Hotel after the purchase by Flagler.

Flagler had already built the grand Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, which opened January 10, 1888, by the time he purchased the Hotel Ormond. The Florida East Coast Railway, owned by Flagler, purchased the St. Johns & Halifax River Railway on January 1, 1893. Ultimately the Florida East Coast Railway ran from Jacksonville to Key West along the eastern coast of Florida, with fine hotels for guests along the way, greatly increasing the number of tourists coming to Florida.

The Hotel Ormond, and Ormond, became a major winter season tourist destination for the wealthy including, among many others, The Prince of Wales, Will Rogers, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Thomas Edison, President Warren Harding, Harriett Beecher Stowe, George and Babe Zaharias, John Philip Sousa, the Astors, Vanderbilts, and Al Capone. In 1923 Ed Sullivan became the golf secretary for the Hotel Ormond after losing his newspaper job in Miami.¹

¹ Some of the information contained in this document was obtained from materials published by our good friends at the Ormond Beach Historical Society.

Flagler's former business partner in the Standard Oil Company, John D. Rockefeller, spent four seasons in the Hotel Ormond beginning in 1914 before purchasing an estate on the Halifax just across Granada Boulevard to the south named the Casements, where he wintered until dying there in 1937. He and his son, David, were members of the Ormond Union Church. By the 1920's Ormond was known as the "Millionaires Colony".

In 1903 some of the first automobile races were held on the hard packed beaches at Ormond. In 1904 Flagler built a garage just east of the Ormond Hotel, on Granada Boulevard, to house the racing vehicles. Some of the early racers and enthusiasts were Ransom E. Olds, Alexander Winton, William K. Vanderbilt II, Barney Oldfield, Henry Ford, Louis Chevrolet, Glenn Curtiss, and Sir Malcolm Campbell. Ormond became known as "The Birthplace of Speed".

By 1910 the population of Ormond had more than tripled from that in 1890 to 780. Along with the many winter visitors Ormond was significantly more populated, and developed, than it had been when incorporated just 30 years earlier.

III. Creation of the Ormond Yacht Club

Against this backdrop a group of residents, predominantly men, determined that a social organization with a clubhouse on the Halifax would be desirable. To that end, on January 20, 1908, permission was sought from, and given by, the Ormond Board of Alderman (town council) to build a wharf at the foot of Lincoln Avenue. A little more than two years later, on February 7, 1910, the Board of Alderman also gave permission to the "Ormond Boat Club" to build a "club house" over the river at the foot of Lincoln Avenue. This location was almost directly across the river from the Hotel Ormond, just a little to the north.

The Ormond Yacht Club was chartered on February 10, 1910 "to increase the sociability and general up-building of the town of Ormond and to promote boating in its broadest sense". The Ormond Union Church, which owned the property on either side of Lincoln Avenue and across Palmetto Street, North, now North Beach Street, adjacent to the Halifax, gave their permission to build a clubhouse on the "parsonage ground" for a period of twenty-five years at the nominal cost of \$5 per year. They asked that the OYC "build a good-looking house and that nothing objectionable should be carried on in the building".

IV. Ormond Yacht Club Clubhouse

The OYC retained prominent local architect and builder Sumner Hale Gove to design the clubhouse. A 34' x 26' two story wood frame building with wood shingles on the sides and roof was built. Originally there were decks on the south

and east sides, and now there are decks on the west and south sides. There is a 147' walkway from the shore to the building and, originally, there was an approximately 300' dock extending from the northeast corner of the building to a boat shed with stalls. The boat shed was destroyed, presumably by a storm, in the early 1920's and wasn't replaced.

While boating never seems to have been a major emphasis of the OYC it was certainly of some significance. At the time of construction of the clubhouse and boat shed dredging was done to accommodate boating. There are records in the OYC archives documenting fees paid for docking boats. Reference is made in the OYC meeting minutes to the "dock" being destroyed by storms in 1944 and 1950 and being rebuilt. In 1946 the OYC made a request to the Town of Ormond that they include in their dredging application to the federal government a channel 25 feet wide by 8 feet deep from the main channel to within about 10 feet of the retaining wall at the east end of Lincoln Avenue "in line with the Club Pier and Club house and along the south side of same".

In the letter sent to the mayor on this subject it was stated that "the members of this club think this is the minimum that should be made for the small craft which can and will be used. . . . We further call your attention to the fact that some years ago a Government dredge pumped in spoil in front of the Ormond Union Church and Village Improvement Assns. retaining wall without any such authority and that they left that spoil there and ruined that part of the River-front and the basin formerly used by the Yacht Club". It is unclear whether any such dredging was ever done. However, it is clear that the use of small boats, but not what would likely be considered by most as yachts, was of some importance to the OYC from 1910 through at least 1950.

The interior of the building is made of rough sawn cypress and pine. There are four rooms on the first floor. There are two exterior doors on the south side of the first floor. Entering through the western of these there is a 16' x 19' pool room which has housed the same pool table since at least 1912. There is a bathroom accessible through a door in the pool room which is along the northern wall on the west end. Behind the bathroom are the exterior stairs to the second floor which are accessible only from the deck on the west side.

A door on the east side of the pool room leads to the cards/reading/sitting room with spacious views of the Halifax River and the western shore. Until 1992, when the Hotel Ormond was razed, it was the dominant feature of the views. This room runs the entire width of the building and is 14' deep. A monumental, native coquina rock and masonry fireplace is located at the northern wall of this room. To the left of the fireplace, through the western wall of this room is a doorway to a small office of approximately 12' x 10'.

The second floor is entirely open except for a 9' x 6' bathroom in the northwest corner. The second floor has served as a meeting room for the

members as well as many other local organizations over the years, including the Ormond Board of Trade (Chamber of Commerce), the Garden Club, the Ormond Board of Realtors, the VIA, the Boy Scouts, and Girls Club. When the Anderson-Price Memorial Building was being built by the VIA in 1915 they met in the OYC Clubhouse. In addition to meetings, dances and pot-luck dinners were held upstairs, and meetings and social events continue to be held upstairs.

Originally there was a wooden set of stairs from the south deck to the second floor in the center of the south wall. In November 1914 the members voted to remove those stairs, and they were replaced by the stairs which now exist and are accessed from the west deck. In December of 1915 the members voted to wire the building for electricity.

Some modifications have been made to the building over the years, but relatively few, some of which may be reversed in the future. The clubhouse remains largely unchanged and retains its original appearance, layout, and essential character.

V. Founding Members

There were 50 founding members of the OYC, many of whom were local pioneers and civil leaders whose descendants still live in Ormond Beach (Ormond became Ormond Beach in 1950). Elected as officers were; President, D. W. Lewis; Vice President, Charles McNary; Secretary, Fred Camell; Treasurer, A. A. Buck; Commodore, Israel Putnam; Vice Commodore, James Camell; and Trustees, J. D. Price, Henry C. Irons and Frank Mason. Annual dues were \$5 and a key to the clubhouse cost 25 cents. All members were men, and this continued for many years, but is no longer true as there are many female members and have been since at least the early 2000s.

Two of the original founding members were John Anderson and Joseph Downing Price who built and managed the Hotel Ormond. The building built by the Ladies of the Village Improvement Association in 1915, now owned by the Ormond Beach Historical Society, which is across the street and just to the south of the OYC clubhouse, was named in their honor.

Another founding member was Israel Putnam, who was a winter visitor. He was descended from the modern founder of Saratoga Springs, New York, Gideon Putnam, who built Saratoga's Grand Union and Congress Hotels. Israel Putnam was the owner of the yacht, *Ida B.*, which he docked at the Halifax River Yacht Club in Daytona. He made a loan of \$500.00 to the OYC which presumably was used to pay for the cost of construction of the clubhouse. Tragically he was killed in WWI in France on September 26, 1918, at age 40.

Founding member James P. Vining was the clerk of the Ormond oceanfront Coquina Hotel built in 1889 and purchased by Anderson and Price

in 1903. When Anderson and Price died in 1911 Vining purchased the Coquina Hotel and then demolished it in 1923 to build a new and grander version. Vining's wife was a charter member and financial supporter of the VIA and the Vining Bird Bath in the gardens along the Halifax in front of the Anderson-Price Memorial Building is named for the Vinings.

There are many more notable founding members but the short biographies on the few above are representative. Additional information on founding members has been, and will be, shared otherwise. The OYC continues to engage in historical research regarding the OYC and its founding members.

VI. Ormond Yacht Club Historical Significance

The OYC continues as a club, as it always has been, however, the primary mission is now preservation of the iconic clubhouse and the OYC history. Information on membership, events, and other items of interest, can be found on the OYC website @ ormondyachtclub.com and on Instagram @ [#ormondyachtclub](https://www.instagram.com/ormondyachtclub).

The OYC was incorporated as a Florida not for profit corporation on October 31, 1961, and is an IRS 501(c)(3) charitable organization to which tax-deductible donations may be made. The OYC clubhouse has been designated a City of Ormond Beach Historic Landmark and was added to the National Register of Historic Places on April 19, 2005. The OYC clubhouse was named one of the "11 to Save" by the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation for 2023.