

# The Mandarin Community Club Celebrating 100 Years!



## The Mandarin Community Club's Early Beginnings

The Mandarin Community Club's history is closely tied to patriotic activities leading up to the nation's entry into World War I. In 1916, a group of Mandarin citizens formed the Mandarin Liberty League prior to the nation's April 6, 1917 entry in the Great War today referred to as World War I.

The Mandarin Liberty League created and promoted projects to assist with war efforts. They participated in patriotic parades; promoted Liberty Loan drives; and created garden projects, receiving an award from the Florida State Fair and Exposition.

When the war ended, the group continued to gather, but the activities and purpose changed. People began bringing community issues to the group, and on July 2, 1923, 27 individuals met and founded the Mandarin Community Club. In fact, the group elected the same officers who "successfully directed" the Mandarin Liberty League, including Walter Jones, President; Mrs. William Jeacle, Vice-President; Miss Kate Monson, Secretary; and Mrs. C.M. Brown, Treasurer.

## A Glance at the 1930's

In the club's earliest years, Walter Jones and George Dinsmore served as club presidents, and likely at least one other individual unidentified at this time. In that first decade, club concern centered on the need to secure electricity for the community; advance mail service; improve poor roads; and increase tree safety along Mandarin's "St. Johns Avenue," today known as Mandarin Road.

Records from 1931 through 1934 indicate Earl Paxton began a four year term as club president. On November 10, 1931, the Mandarin Community Club, then eight years old, voted to spend \$50 to furnish "for club purposes" the old Mandarin School. By this time, the school of 54 years had been closed for approximately five years and the club was using the building. On April 1, 1932, Mandarin's baseball team was given the club's permission to store their equipment in the old school; the team also played their games on the property.

Holmes LaMar served as president from 1935 to 1938, and during his term, two notable club projects transformed the community. Mandarin's first library opened in the old school (now often called the "club's building") on April 17, 1935, with 700 books; the number of published works soon increased to 1400. Then on June 5, 1936, Mandarin celebrated its biggest event of the decade when municipal electricity was finally available to the community's residents! Club leaders and members had led the effort for electrical service for 13 years.

Two years later, in 1938, Edwin Jones and Carr Mina Jones purchased the old Mandarin School, and "made it official," presenting the building to the Mandarin Community Club as the group's home and headquarters. For nearly a century the old Mandarin School building, now 150 years old, has been known as the Mandarin Community Club.

J.L. Mc Math ended the club's second decade when he assumed the presidency in 1939, and continued to serve through the dramatic month of December 1941, when the United States entered World War II following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Countdown to the Mandarin Community Club centennial began with a 99th anniversary kick-off in July, recognizing the July 2, 1923 date a group of area citizens decided to transition from their former World War I role as the Mandarin Liberty League to a civic organization enhancing Mandarin community life.

## A Glance at the 1940's

When the 1940's arrived, the Mandarin Community Club was nearly twenty years old, and its clubhouse, the former Mandarin School neared an aging 70. As a hub of area cultural and civic life, the old school was now called the Mandarin Community Club. Joseph L. McMath, 1940 club president, spearheaded revised club by-laws extending free use of the building to the P.T.A. and religious groups, including "community" Sunday school taught at the club.

By the 1940's, the club's tireless efforts had secured municipal electricity for Mandarin. The group continued to improve and use its building for cultural activities, including a Mandarin library, a first for the community. The club also provided a home for the area baseball team, the Mandarin Orange Pickers (pictured below). In fact, the semi-professional team played their games next to the building and used the club as a "type of headquarters" from 1925 until the late 1940s.



*The Mandarin Orange Pickers, a semi professional baseball team, played its games next to the Mandarin Community Club from 1925 until the end of the 1940's.*

The community was rocked to its core on December 7, 1941 when news of the Pearl Harbor attack arrived. Soon, the club's free uses expanded to cover World War II activities, including first aid classes.

The view across the St. Johns from Mandarin, along with the pulsating hum of WWII flight instruction, provided residents a front row seat to the nation's war efforts at the recently established NAS Jax, the site of the old Joseph E. Johnston World War I Camp. During 1942 and 1943, Leslie B. Jones, from a family still associated with Mandarin, lead the club.

In 1944 and 1945, Harry Gray served as club president. Gas rationing and other war limitations were perhaps a factor in the decision to allow free building use on Saturday nights to the "Teenage Club." A state census conducted in 1945 reports the Mandarin township at 1,861, but population numbers varied, typically increasing, depending on the boundaries used. Not yet a part of Jacksonville, the growing village continued to offer a quiet country life to Duval County residents.

Approximately eight weeks after the end of WWII, on November 2, 1945, the Mandarin Community Club founded the Mandarin Garden Club from a Beautification Committee instituted the previous year. Eventually, the Mandarin Garden Club moved from its "mother club" site, establishing its own building and large membership.

James A. Austin served as Mandarin Community Club President in 1946 and 1947, and Glen Calmes in 1948, when a signature project was implemented, club use for a Well-Baby Clinic, an activity lasting decades. By 1948, the Home Demonstration Club also received permission to hold activities at the building, including one of the earliest demonstrations in Duval County of a new electric marvel, known as television!

Ending the decade of leadership was Walter W. Arrowsmith, club president during 1949 and 1950. During his term, records indicate on June 3, 1949, the board requested H. Chapman organize live theater at the building, perhaps indicating skepticism for television's future. These theatricals welcomed a new era of activities, including major renovations in the upcoming decade. President Arrowsmith completed his term in 1950, with one of the club's most important achievements— establishing a Volunteer Fire Department for Mandarin.

## A Glance at 1950's

On the evening of July 2, 1923, a group of area citizens decided to transition from their dated World War I role as the Mandarin Liberty League to a civic organization enhancing Mandarin community life, and the Mandarin Community Club was founded. The group, reluctant to disband after the war, had long responded to a myriad of community concerns.

Now, nearly one hundred years later, the club has increased its activity and physical footprint. In fact, the Mandarin Community Club celebrates its centennial in less than nine months with enlarged efforts for historic preservation and continued projects to enhance life for all area residents.

This article, fourth in a series, focuses on the club's impact in the 1950's, when the organization was nearly thirty years old, and its clubhouse, the former Mandarin School approached an aging 80. As a hub of area cultural and civic life, few people still referred to the building as the "old school"—the Mandarin Community Club name seemed firmly affixed.



THE MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB, CIRCA 1953, NOT LONG AFTER RELOCATION TO ITS CURRENT SITE. THE BUILDING WAS MOVED FROM ITS PERCH NEAR THE ROAD ABOUT 100 FEET SOUTHWEST. AFTER THE MOVE, THE BASEMENT AND STAGE WERE ADDED.

Walter W. Arrowsmith served as club president in 1949 and 1950. During his term, records state on June 3, 1949, the board decided to support live theater productions in the building, and the troupe known as The Mandarin Players was born. These theatricals welcomed a new era of activities, including an impetus for major building renovations.

President Arrowsmith completed his term in 1950, with one of the club's most important achievements—establishing a Mandarin Volunteer Fire Department.

Joseph Caldwell assumed the presidency in 1951. During the year, the club's founding president, Walter Jones and club founding treasurer, Fannie Brown, both long deceased, were honored by a plaque placed

at the club. The club's new "start-up" organization, The Mandarin Players, were now active tenants and began to assist with club improvements, including repair of the club's then jukebox! By the following year, the Player's were contributing money to the club's pump and well fund, necessary infrastructure for building use. Likely, the group raised money from tickets purchased to attend performances.

In 1952, attorney Philip S. May served as president, continuing the club's relationship with theatricals, the Bloodmobile and as a meeting site for religious groups. Whether he was in communication with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings during this time is unknown, but he had represented the famous author in a colorful and drawn out lawsuit through much of the 1940's. In fact, the case eventually went to the Florida Supreme Court. So, presumably, May knew what he was talking about when he advised the club's board there was no need to file an "annual return" with the IRS.

The popularity of the "Players" prompted interest in constructing a stage attached to the back of the building. During Gay Livingston's 1953 presidency, the building was moved slightly southwest—away from its perch near the edge of Mandarin Road, where the traffic was now judged more active. When relocated, a stage and basement were added. The stage, while primitive in some respects, mirrored a professional operation with dressing rooms and prop storage, largely intact today.

By May 1, 1953, the "Players" offered to pay \$250 to use the club and stage for the year. But the club's theater group wasn't the only regular activity, a Well Bay Clinic continued to serve the community, and at least intermittently, a library. By the fall, President Livingston appointed a Vigilante Committee chaired by board member Rueben Bowden. The only written record describing the committee's task, stated "to be alert to unwelcome change in Mandarin."



THE KATE MONSON WELL BABY CLINIC WAS A DECADES-LONG ACTIVITY AT THE MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB. SHOWN ABOVE IS THE SIGN THAT HUNG NEXT TO THE CLUB'S RIGHT FRONT DOOR.

Bowden was elected president in 1954 and 1955, when By-laws were amended and new policies adopted. A ten year agreement with the theatre company was executed for \$250 a year. Also, the Mandarin Garden Club took on the role as the club's groundskeepers.

Samuel Edward Lorimier, Sr., served as president in 1956 when an August vote created ex-officio positions on the club's board for presidents of the Mandarin Garden Club, Mandarin Volunteer Fire Department, "Athletic Club" and the Mandarin Players. All groups were either founded by the Mandarin Community Club or held strong ties.

A January Bloodmobile drive opened the 1957 presidential year of Guy E. Dodd. Highlighting his term, sufficient funds were finally raised to construct a building for the Mandarin Volunteer Fire Department.

The following year, when Louis T. Bates assumed the presidency, plans were created for a kitchen remodeling, but funds to implement the work were unavailable. Within the month, a fundraiser covered dish supper was held to assist in the effort. In December, the club celebrated Kate Monson's 35 years of membership. Likely, Monson was the last active member among the club's 1923 founding members.

In 1959, President, F. K. Dunlap helped "reactivate" the club's library, according to old records. The library was opened or reopened in the large basement where until more recent decades the old shelves could be seen.

## A Glance at the 1960's

In 1960, the club, now nearly 40 years old, faced a decade of dramatic changes. It was telling that the decade began with a club request for improved policing from Duval County. Harold Younger served as president. The club also opposed zoning at Beauclerc Point for uses other than single family homes.

T.Z. Cason led the club in 1961 and 62, and some records indicate he presided again in 1964. Cason appointed a committee to study Mandarin growth. By late summer, Duval County created a Planning Board.

By 1963, the little 1911 Store and Post Office on Mandarin Road next to the club was no longer sufficient to handle area mail. The community's post office relocated to State Road 13 to accommodate the growing population. With the post office closed, the store's closing followed in 1964.

On September 10, 1964, Hurricane Dora swept into North Florida. A devastating loss in Mandarin was the Episcopal Church of Our Saviour and its Tiffany window dedicated to Harriet Beecher and Calvin Stowe. For some residents of the burgeoning Mandarin, the storm clarified the need for more government services.

In the spring of 1968, an area milestone included the first Mandarin Art Festival. The festival, today more than a half century old, is a signature club project and also raises much of the funding necessary to maintain the club's historic buildings and properties. While Judge Edward Westberry gets the credit as festival founder, Frank N. Dunlap, was serving as president near this time.

Theodore Flynn, a Mandarin native and longtime active community member served as president in the 1960's. The highly connected Flynn, born in 1911, attended school in the club's building and was owner

of the family's longtime business, primarily a hardware and feed store located at Loretto and Flynn roads. By the 60's, the business moved to San Jose Blvd. and Westberry Road as Flynn's Ace Hardware and Feed.

Flynn was also a proponent of Consolidation. With citywide passage of Consolidation in 1968, new blown-out city limits were established to Julington Creek. Overnight, Mandarin was suddenly part of the largest geographic city in the world! The rural feel of the community still existed, but it was clear that urbanization, good or bad, was on the way.



THEODORE FLYNN, A THIRD GENERATION MANDARIN RESIDENT, WAS A 1960'S PRESIDENT OF THE MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB AND A 15-YEAR PRESIDENT OF THE MANDARIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT. HE ALSO LED THE MANDARIN ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION. FLYNN, WHO COMPLETED EIGHTH GRADE BUT WAS UNABLE TO TRAVEL TO HIGH SCHOOL IN JACKSONVILLE, SERVED ON THE PRESTIGIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT STUDY COMMISSION WHICH LED TO CONSOLIDATION.

## A Glance at the 1970's

Countdown to the Mandarin Community Club centennial began with a 99th anniversary kick-off in July, recognizing the 1923 date a group of area citizens transitioned from their former World War I role as the Mandarin Liberty League to a civic organization enhancing Mandarin community life.

In the early 1970's, the rural feel that still existed in Mandarin, was completely up-ended. The Buckman Bridge opening on May 1, 1970, brought dramatic changes. Traffic increased, not only with local bridge use, but also for travelers streaming into Florida. As cars zoomed across the three-mile bridge to points south, tranquility in Mandarin was all but lost.





THE HENRY HOLLAND BUCKMAN BRIDGE OPENED IN MAY 1970, FOREVER CHANGING TRAFFIC AND GROWTH IN THE MANDARIN COMMUNITY AND ADJUSTING MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB CONCERNS. PHOTO COURTESY FLORIDA MEMORY.

Suddenly, it was common to see auto tags from across the nation on Mandarin roadways. Travelers lined up at the increasing number of fast food options. Initially, the Burger King, at the foot of the Buckman Bridge was the popular quick-stop. Then, a McDonald's, now long gone, arrived in Mandarin, north of the Buckman Bridge on San Jose Boulevard.

Judge Edward P. Westberry served as club president in 1971, and continued the club's Easter Sunday Mandarin Art Festival he founded in 1968. A signature club project, the festival is now more than a half-century old. As 1972 approached, the club's historic building, the Mandarin School, turned 100.

Wilson L. Smith served as president from 1973 through 1976. During these years, the club continued to serve as supporters and home to a Well Baby Clinic and the theater group, Mandarin Players.

James M. Barker IV, known to all as Jim, held the presidency in 1977, and had served nearly a decade earlier on the original Mandarin Art Festival Committee. He recalls "putting together around 40 artists and craftsmen, and it was a real hit." Assigned the job of treasurer, his job was to keep up with the vendors sales collecting ten percent commission on purchases. There were no entry or booth fees in the early days. Barker is still active in the club 54 years later.

Other 1970's presidents include William K. Mouro in 1972, Richard C. Davis in 1978 and in 1979, Chad Taylor.

The once sleepy village seemingly devoured by the 1970's, steeled itself for a new decade of growth with increased zoning issues, traffic woes and the need to construct middle and senior high schools, not yet established in Mandarin. Students traveled to Wolfson or duPont for a public education! Yet, by the end of the 70's, the club had provided 57 years of impressive community service.

## A Glance at the 1980's

By 1980, the organization neared 60 years and its historic building, the old Mandarin School, had long passed the century mark. The club was overwhelmed with new concerns as developments of all sizes—commercial and residential—sprang up in the area. Traffic began to worsen. Many amenities, such as public high schools and middle schools, were non-existent. Wolfson was the nearest public high school, and for middle school students, a trip to duPont was required.

Beauclerc and Loretto Elementary schools educated Mandarin's youngest students, but in 1980 Crown Point Elementary was added for Mandarin's booming baby population.

Carolyn MacDonald served as 1980 club president followed by Mel K. Arthur in 1981, Harry Gillian in 1982 and Jeffrey P. Anderson in 1983. The club continued as home of the Mandarin Players theater group and as a Well-Baby Clinic site. By the end of the decade, the club's signature project, the Mandarin Art Festival celebrated 20 years.

Noted Mandarin artist Lucinda Halsema was elected 1984 president. Mary Ann Southwell, multi-year chair of the growing Mandarin Art Festival served as president in 1985 and 86, and a little more than a decade later she represented Mandarin on the City Council. Jessie Mayberry presided in 1987 and 88, when dramatic storms felled majestic trees along Mandarin Road and nearby areas. Tracey L. Arpen, Jr. was elected president in 1989 and again in 1990.

As the decade neared an end, Mandarin, along with other parts of the city, experienced its first White Christmas in recorded history. As snow began to fall on December 23 and again on the 24th, the usual holiday preparations and last minute shopping halted, and Mandarin children eagerly played in the unfamiliar snow.

Suddenly, one more gift or another side dish at Christmas dinner took a backseat to the beauty and wonder of the season—not to mention the safety. Many Southerners had no idea how to drive in snow! For the first time in the booming 80's decade, Mandarin was perfectly still. Most residents were forced to park their cars and enjoy the quiet beauty of the holiday.

Every bridge in Jacksonville was closed except the 1921 Acosta Bridge—now demolished. Even Mandarin's mammoth Buckman Bridge was silenced as the temperatures dropped to 26 degrees and the precipitation turned to sleet and snow.

## A Glance at the 1990's

In the 1990's, the Mandarin Community Club reached 70 years and its historic building, the old Mandarin School, 120 years. Mandarin native Tracey Arpen lead the decade, serving as president in 1989 and 1990. During his term, long range planning set the club's course and underscored a mission of community service, education and commitment to the club's historic property and area history preservation.

He was followed by George Koury in 1991, who focused on fundraising to help propel the mission. Carl

Davis led the club in 1992 with a special interest in establishing a permanent Mandarin history museum facility.

Emily Lisska, president in 1993 through 1995, secured a state restoration grant for the club's historic building (the Mandarin School) invigorating building use and creating a renewed revenue source. During her presidency, the club celebrated the 25th Mandarin Art Festival and its 70th birthday. A 1993 parade down Mandarin Road culminated at an all-day "1923 fair" at the club with silhouette artists, barbershop performers, a native plant sale and roll-back prices for crafts, foods and "paddlewheel" boat rides on the St. Johns.

In August, 1993, the Mandarin Community Club, in a determined fundraising effort, purchased the 1911 Mandarin Store and Post Office, immediately adjacent to its property. The structure served as Mandarin's post office for a half century, and later as a newspaper publishing headquarters, an antique shop and rental bungalow. A lease was signed for a dollar a year with the Mandarin Museum for the building's use and maintenance— a relationship that continues today.

Mike Garvin served in 1996 and William H. Jeter, Mandarin native, held two terms, 1997 and 1998. During President Jeter's terms, emphasis was placed on continued historic preservation projects, securing state grant funding for the Mandarin Post Office and Store restoration and purchase of the adjoining Billard property on Brady Road. During his term, a 125th edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Palmetto Leaves* was published with a foreword written by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Joan Hedrick.

Sheryl Biermann and Ruth Daniel ended the decade sharing a term. President Daniel also led the club into the year 2000.

## A Glance at the 2000's



MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB IN THE 2000S

The Mandarin Community Club will be recognized and honored for its one hundred years of service by Councilman Michael Boylan at the June 27, 2023 Jacksonville City Council meeting.

In the 2000's, the Mandarin Community Club turned 80 years old and its historic building, the old Mandarin School, reached 130 years. Ruth Daniel led the decade, serving as president in 2000 and 2001. She was followed by Bill Bosworth, who focused on community forums and membership.

Bruce Scott held the presidency in 2003 when fundraisers helped secure much needed funds to maintain the historic properties. The club also continued its long practice of collecting food for individuals in need. The club began the process of securing local designation for its two historic structures, the Mandarin Community Club (1872 Mandarin School) and the 1911 Mandarin Post Office and General Store. Dan Copeland followed as 2004 president.

Ruth Daniel served again in 2005, with the club organizing a special community wide meeting for hurricane preparedness. When Wanda Bosworth served as president in 2006, the club was involved in an effort to stop development of an eleven-story condominium tower at Julington Creek. The club's success with the hurricane forum and its involvement to stop the high-rise construction were important factors when the club received the 2006 Mayor's Neighborhood Award for Outstanding Civic Organization.

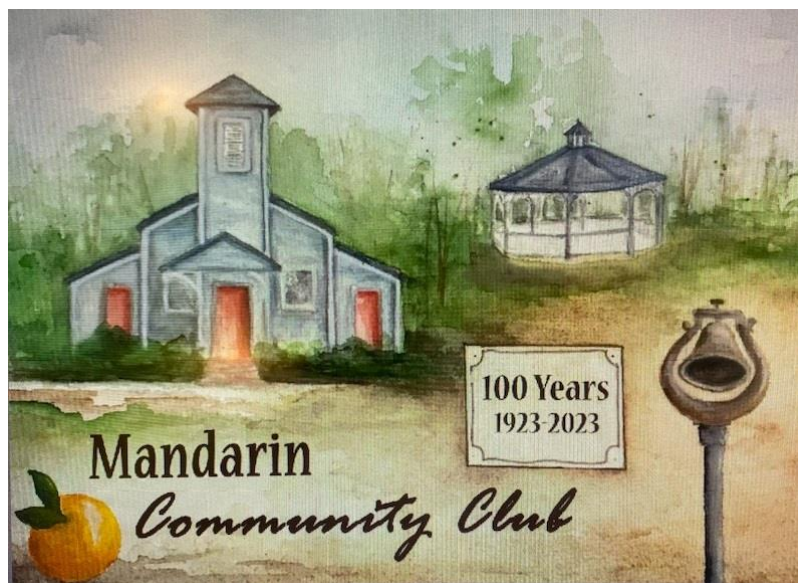
Susie Scott, who actively fought the towering Julington Creek project, served as president in 2007 through 2009. She retired the club's 1997 mortgage on adjoining club land and coordinated the

construction of a passive park, the Billard Commemorative Park (on Brady Road just south of Mandarin Road). For these efforts, among others, including the Mandarin Art Festival's 40 year run in 2008, the club was presented Jax Pride's Award of Excellence. Pat Corrado, elected club president in 2010, was well known for his longtime work perpetuating the Club's Annual Art Festival.

Susie Scott stepped up again to serve as president in 2011 and 2012. In 2012 through 2014, Emily Lisska held the presidency. In celebration of the club's 90th anniversary in 2013, the club Board voted to purchase the Sisters of St. Joseph's Schoolhouse, then in the backyard of a private residence. The old school was immediately deeded to the city by the club, "as a gift to the community" and moved to the Walter Jones Park in early 2015.

Susie Scott has continued to serve as president since 2015, with a brief interruption in 2018, when Emily Lisska stepped in as Scott stepped away for medical reasons. By this time, the club's Mandarin Art Festival reached the half century mark.

Under Scott's lengthy leadership, the club has established an annual tree give-away to underscore its commitment to Mandarin's tree coverage; added a popular holiday tree lighting on its historic properties; took ownership of a tree-filled acre plus adjoining the historic club property, generously gifted by Marilyn Carpenter; continued its active restoration efforts for its historic properties; partnered with OneBlood for quarterly blood drives; and published works on Mandarin's history. The club continues to raise funds to maintain its extraordinary historic properties for the benefit of the Mandarin community and is preparing to envision its next one hundred years!



MANDARIN COMMUNITY CLUB 100 YEARS ARTWORK BY LOCAL ARTIST JULIE FETZER