

Horse and Chaise Gazette



December 2025

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Teri Ostroviak, President

President's Message

VHI is ready to start this 25/26 season with many enjoyable historical get togethers. City of Venice Centennial start exploded with a great parade! VHI was represented with 3 board members riding in a 102-year old car! We had a little trouble starting that honey of a car but after a gentle push by the owner, a board member, and a sweet stranger, we were on our way!

VHI has fun things planned this season, check our Events listings. Always FREE for all is our Library talks, a visit to the Venice Museum and now the Old Betsy Museum will have Earl Midlam, chief caretaker for Old Betsy, at the Museum to talk about Old Betsy and the Venice Fire department and most Saturdays until May. Earl loves to share his experiences with Old Betsy. Remember that VHI participates with an information booth in the Jan and March 2025 Venice Art and Crafts shows, so please stop by and say hi. OR Volunteer for a short shift and spread your knowledge of historical Venice, see the Volunteer listings. Also free is our Annual Meeting to be held in March 2026 at the exciting Lord Higel Coffee Shop which is housed in the lovely Lord Higel House. VHI contributed nearly \$ 1 M in funds and volunteer efforts to stabilize that home and we are proud to see the happy use of the property.

CHECK OUT THESE EVENTS - VHI has an amazing opportunity this year with our Members ONLY event to tour one of the important homes of Venice, the Blalock House located at 241 South Harbor Drive. Become a member now and enjoy the unique tour, light snacks, and music on the patio, plus all the benefits of supporting VHI's mission. I can't forget that there will be some infamous punch made by the current owner of the home. Also, our Annual Luncheon will feature John McCarthy, a Vice President of Selby Gardens – Spanish Point, as our speaker. To hear John's tales is well worth the price of the Luncheon. As a reminder, this 25/26 winter season VHI will not be offering our usual trolley tours.

Join VHI and be part of helping Venice history stay alive through our support of the Historic Resources Department of the City of Venice. Our next newsletter will be in April 2026.

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About Venice

If you've driven through Venice, Florida, you've likely traveled the Tamiami Trail—but its historical impact on the community goes far beyond convenience.

In the early 1900s, South Florida remained largely undeveloped. Fort Myers was accessible only by steamer or rail after 1904, and no land route connected the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. By 1915, discussions began about a road linking Fort Myers to Miami. Tampa's E.P. Dickey expanded the vision, proposing a roadway from Tampa to Miami—thus, the “Tamiami Trail” was born.

Intended as a crucial link between Florida's Gulf and Atlantic coasts, the Trail would cut through the Everglades and open up vast areas for development. The section from Sarasota to Venice was completed shortly after World War I, contributing to the formation of Sarasota County in 1921. A Chamber of Commerce brochure at the time marketed Venice as a land of opportunity to northern investors and tourists.

The entire trail took 13 years to complete, officially opening on April 25, 1928. While most attention centered on the Everglades portion, Venice celebrated its own part in the achievement. The **Venice News** promoted the opening as "the greatest road celebration in the state's history." Governor John Martin led a motorcade from Tampa to Miami, stopping in towns along the way, including Venice.

In Venice, Mayor Ned Worthington cut the ceremonial ribbon, and gubernatorial candidate Doyle Carlton delivered a speech at the Civic Center. The event sparked local pride and expectations for a tourism and development boom. Businesses adopted a new slogan: **“Venice—Where the Tamiami Trail Meets the Gulf of Mexico.”** The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) Realty even donated a bus to the Chamber of Commerce to attract visitors.

At the time, Venice was still a small village, but the Trail's completion gave it vital connections to cities like Tampa and Fort Myers. Tourists, settlers, and investors could now easily reach the area, transforming the region's accessibility.

However, the optimism was short-lived. The Great Depression hit soon after the grand opening, dimming the economic promise the Trail had symbolized. Rather than ushering people in, it became an escape route out of town. Local businesses faltered, and real estate ventures stalled. Even community events hosted by the BLE couldn't offset the growing economic strain.

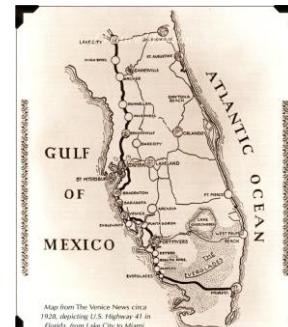
By the end of 1928, the combined phone listings for Venice, Nokomis, and Laurel totaled just thirty-five—a stark sign of the economic downturn.

Despite the challenges, the Tamiami Trail permanently altered Venice's trajectory. It brought growth, connection, and opportunity, setting the foundation for the modern community.

Next time you drive U.S. 41 through Venice, remember: you're on a road that helped shape the city—born from vision, built with determination, and weathered by history. If it helps, try singing along to [The Tamiami Trail Song](#).



Tamiami Trail gas station-1998



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We are getting into full swing with all our seasonal activities. We hope you've had a chance to attend and learn from our engaging lecture programs so far. History @ the Library is always a wonderful Friday afternoon at the Venice Public Library. Look elsewhere in this newsletter for future lecture topics and dates.

We continue to participate in the Arts Festivals and Craft Fairs put on by Venice MainStreet downtown. If you attend any of the upcoming ones, be sure to stop by and say "hi." There's also opportunities to pick up a great local history book or two. More on that below.

Our four big events are coming up in the next few months. Starting January 18, the annual Members Only Open House will be our kickoff event for the city's centennial. Step into the past for an afternoon at the Blalock House! This 1927 gem on Harbor Drive was home to James Blalock, the first elected mayor of Venice, and his wife Ethel Blalock, who was involved in many social and charitable organizations. This house is one of a handful of properties listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places. Enjoy a tour of this private home and an afternoon in the backyard with refreshments. But remember, you have to be a member of Venice Heritage to enjoy this free event!

On February 3 is our annual Heritage Luncheon. This fundraiser event helps us to support work being done by our city's Historical Resources Division. It will take place at the lovely Venice Yacht Club where our guest speaker—John McCarthy from Marie Selby's Historic Spanish Point—will delight us with some delicious history.



Harry talks to an interested listener after the November Library Lecture



What happened to the Venice Golf & CC?

March comes in like a lion with two big events. The annual writer's festival and book fair takes place again in West Blalock Park. Soon after, the annual meeting will be held at the new Lord-Higel's Coffee House. See how this adaptively reused building put history on caffeine.

Venice Heritage has other centennial activities in the works. In November we will be participating in the Centennial Kickoff Holiday Parade. Look for us in an antique convertible once owned by a member of the Roosevelt family. Next we will be launching a series of geocache travel bugs; this is part of the world of geocaching. If you are not familiar with that, we will basically be launching items representing Dr. Fred Albee, Bertha Palmer, and John Nolen, with the quest to have these items travel to Colonia, NJ; Chicago, IL; and Cambridge, MA, respectively.

Be on the look out for two book launches. The city's fire truck, Old Betsy, is completing its autobiography not so ghost written by Corky Daulton. It will tell the history of the truck from its own perspective. We are also working with members of the Venice-Nokomis Woman's Club to reprint Louella Albee's *Doctor and I*, about her life with Dr. Fred Albee.

With all of these exciting things happening, we hope you will consider being part of the fun by joining us, supporting us, or getting involved with volunteering with us. You'll be glad you did.

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History @ Venice Library – 2nd Friday of the Month,

2025-2026 Season

Date	Topic	Speaker
Jan. 9, 2026	Nature Let the Way to a Casino	Harry Klinkhamer (11 am)
Feb. 13, 2026	Stories of the Venice Theater	Jean Trammell (11 am)
Mar. 13, 2026	History of Venice	DVD Presentation (3 pm)
April 10, 2026	Sarasota County During WWII	Josh Goodman (3 pm)
May 8, 2026	Searching for Angola	DVD Presentation (3 pm)

Volunteer Needs

Photographers	Document VHI Activities & Events
Event Helpers	Promote VHI and its merchandise at booths
Lecture Helpers	Prepare and breakdown room
Book Fair Helpers	Populate the VHI booth
Committee Members	Marketing/Membership
	Fund Raising, Governance, Finance
	Volunteer Coordinator
Graphic Designer	Create and distribute flyers to media outlets for VHI events

Membership

Become a Champion of Vintage Venice- Join VHI Today

Support Venice Museums. Promote our rich history. Promote saving and restoring the historic buildings in Venice. We are a volunteer organization that believes in what we do. Go to <https://veniceheritage.org/membership/> to learn more and join.

Coming Events

January 24-26, 2026 Venice Craft Fair

February 3, 2026 Annual Heritage Luncheon Speaker John McCarthy

February 28-March 1 2026 Venice Art Show

March 27, 2026 Writer's Festival – afternoon lectures and evening reception

March 28, 2026 Venice Book Fair in W. Blalock Park 10 am – 2 pm

Volunteers needed for all Events

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From the HRM

As we get into season, things are sure getting busy. Add to that the City of Venice Centennial has kicked off. Lots of excitement is happening at the Division of Historical Resources.

Did you get on board for the centennial at this year's Holiday Parade? Congratulations to the Venice-Nokomis Woman's Club for being Grand Marshall atop Old Betsy. We are happy to be working with them to collect and preserve the history of this amazing group.

We have been busy working on a coffee-table style book highlighting the past, present, and future of Venice to come out in time for the actual anniversary date. This February will see our next photo exhibit on the work of Grover Koons. He was hired to document the building of Venice in the 1920s. You might think that photographs of heavy equipment digging trenches and building roads sounds boring, but come see for yourself how fascinating they are.

Our Holiday Open House is December 13. Join us and take a nice stroll through the decorated trees of Monty Andrews Arboretum, check out the exhibits while the museum is open that evening, enjoy the sounds of the St. Marks Choir, and purchase those special Venice-related items for friends and family. We'll have the Venice and Old Betsy Museums decorated. New this year, we will also be collecting items for The Twig, that supports the needs of foster children and families.

Exciting things are happening, and we are so glad to be working with Venice Heritage as they support the work that we do to preserve our city's great history.



Harry Klinkhamer, Venice Historical Resources Manager



On January 9, 2026 Venice Heritage will be sending some important folks in Venice history back to where they came from. As part of the international phenomena of geocaching, we will be launching three travel bugs—representing John Nolen, Dr. Fred Albee, and Bertha Palmer—from Venice to their former homes.

We will be tracking the progress of these travel bugs with updates in the newsletter, Web site, and on social media. For those who wish to learn more about geocaching, participate, or follow on your own, you can set up an account at [Geocaching.com](https://www.geocaching.com).

More About Venice

This fall the City of Venice added its 14th property to the Local Register of Historical Resources. For years, the home at 500 Nassau Street South went by the name Prentiss French House. But a little sleuthing during the nomination research has proven that he never lived there.

It all started with a simple question: who built the house? A prominent individual such as Prentiss French, landscape architect for John Nolen, would most likely have a story in the *Venice News* about his home being built. There are several stories about buildings going up in Venice at the time, including who built it, who designed it, and who lived in it or had their business in it. But for French there was nothing.

When he first started working in Venice, French and fellow landscape architect Harold Heller lived in a home at 218 Pocono Trail in Nokomis. Though altered, that home still stands. In late 1927, the newspaper reported that French left for Massachusetts to marry architect Helen Douglass. After their honeymoon they took up winter residence at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Warren in Venice.

This brings us back to those newspaper articles about homes built for prominent people in Venice. *This Week in Venice* reported on the building of the Warren residence in July of 1926. The article noted that the home was built on the corner of Nassau and Salerno. What was considered the Prentiss French House sits on the corner of Nassau and Sorrento.

The French's only lived there for less than two years. By 1930 they were living in Sarasota, working for an architectural firm. But the real Prentiss French House is at 429 Nassau Street South.



Another perk when you become a Member of VHI is our annual Members Only Event. Sunday, January 18, 2026

Join now and enjoy our fall events, too. This year, we have a personal tour of a Venice vintage home with refreshments. The backyard has a view of one of Venice's pocket parks.

This is an original home built and owned by BLE Realty Corp. This home shows how a modern addition can be added to a lovely historic structure with elegance.

This special tour is free with your annual membership! [Go to Membership](#)

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VHI hopes you will consider joining us in support of our high priority projects. You may make a donation and specify which project you support by going to <https://veniceheritage.org/donate/>.



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