

Horse and Chaise Gazette

VeniceHeritage
Florida

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Contents

[President's
Message](#)

[About Venice](#)

[Coming Events](#)

[From the HRM](#)

[History @Venice
Library lectures](#)

[More About Venice](#)

[Volunteer Needs](#)

[Membership](#)

[VHI News](#)

[Sponsors](#)

[Photo Page](#)

President's Message

An exciting 2026/27 season is about to begin for VHI and the City of Venice which is swinging into the last half of its Centennial activities. Last season was a special array of happenings for Venice residents and visitors. We hope you made it to more than one event!

Once again, VHI has some great events coming up. Check our VHI website for more detail. To name a few, we are having an October Book Launch with a special reading from the reprint of "Doctor and I", November 7 is our OLD Betsy 100 Year Birthday Block Party with too many fun elements to list here. Our Friday Library lecture series will start on 9/11 this year with a special talk on that world changing event. We are combining our Annual meeting and Members only tour into a meeting at the 1927 Historic Train Freight room, and our annual Luncheon will be at Mission Valley Country Club which is built on land that has a deep history to our area. We hope to see you at several events. Please come up to any VHI Board member and say hello. We really love to hear comments and suggestions.

Check out the wonderful wall mural by artist, Coleen Henry, on the back of the Old Betsy Museum. It is nearly complete and it just makes you smile. I see lots of future Selfie photos with that fun mural.

Don't forget to check our website SHOP tab or the Venice History Museum for books and merchandise. FYI - Men's size Lost Buildings of Venice are SOLD OUT, but we still have Ladies sizes. It was a great fundraiser, and we appreciate your support.

Thank you for your support of VHI in the past and in the future. Our next newsletter will be in December 2026.



Teri Ostroviak, President



The Old Betsy Mural Progresses

[Return to Contents](#)

About Venice

The Vagabonds were Venice's first and only auto racing club from 1953 to 1960. They raced at the airport, turning an amateur hobby into a for profit venture. Some races brought in over 10,000 spectators.

In the early 1950s, a few of the guys from Venice-Nokomis High School (Ve-No-Hi), the original one in Nokomis, would get out of school at 3pm, work for Herb Hanchey driving trucks building the roads in South Venice until 10-11pm at night. Then, they headed to the airport to drag race. Car headlights at the quarter way mark told them when to slow down.

Police Chief Shockey realized the need for these kids to have something constructive to do and rather than street race down Center Road or race from the only stop light in Venice up to Five Points in Sarasota (which would take only 16 minutes), Chief Shockey allowed the races at the airport with the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) blessing. In 1958, the club also purchased insurance from the NHRA and started hosting large spectator events. Racing legend Big Daddy Don Garlits and his brother raced with the boys. A hobby for the love of racing turned into a for profit event.

The Vagabonds were Venice's roadside assistance before there was AAA. They would fix flats, jump batteries, and do other car repairs. The club accepted no money to do this, only giving calling cards to spread the word. The Gondolier newspaper in 1953 boasted a delivery reach of only 1,650 people. So it was a big deal what these VHS teens accomplished in the 1950s, drawing large crowds from across the area.

The club's structured racing era lasted about three years, ending when complaints about noise and traffic forced the shutdown of racing at the airport.



Vagabonds in front of a gas station in 1959. Members include (right to left) Brian Larson, Don Pattison, unidentified police officer, Bobby Rigby, Raleigh Veal, Bob Sherman, Dee Deaterly, Dickie Taylor, Billy Albright, and others. (VMA# 2015.28.01a)

We wrapped up our Friday@ the Library series with a wonderful program by Sherry Robinson Svekis on the Angola Community established by free Blacks along the Manatee River in the 19th Century. Elsewhere you can find the schedule for our 2026-2027 Friday@ the Library series.

This summer we are excited to announce the successful fundraising of over \$60,000 to pay for compact shelving at the Julia Cousins Laning and Dale Laning Archives & Research Center. With the generous support of the Marie Selby Foundation and the Kentucky Military Institute Alumni, the city's archives will be able to store more of Venice's history in the same amount of space.

Coleen Henry continues her work decorating the Old Betsy Museum with a beautiful mural on the back wall. Once completed, it will be a wonderful addition to the public art in Venice and a great way to promote the city's soon-to-be 100-year-old fire truck.

We continue to follow the whereabouts of our three Centennial Geocache Trackables: Dr. Fred Albee, John Nolen, and Bertha Palmer. Dr. Fred Albee was last seen in central Ohio. He's been picked up and hopefully heading east to New Jersey. John Nolen is on his way to Massachusetts by way of Nova Scotia? Strange, but true. Bertha Palmer was last seen in Louisville and heading toward Chicago.

Finally, plans are well under way for the Old Betsy Birthday Bash. On November 7 we will be celebrating the city's fire truck being here 100 years. There will be music, kids activities, antique fire equipment, food trucks, and much more!

Bet you didn't know...

The first stop light came to Venice in 1951.

It was located at the intersection of Venice Avenue and Tamiami Trail



Harry giving a talk on Nov 14, 2025 at the Library



Bertha Palmer in Louisville, KY

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

2026-2026 Season

Date	Topic	Speaker
Sep 11, 2026	9/11 and Venice	VG Editor Bob Mudge
Oct 9, 2026	The Leading Ladies of Sarasota County	Program/Outreach Specialist Meg Lepak
Nov 13, 2026	Vagabonds	Matt Perhac
Jan 8, 2027	The Bells a silent film w/music first shown in Venice, July 1927	First movie shown at El Prado Theatre, later known as Venice Theatre, and in 1937 as the Gulf Theater; located on West Venice
Feb 12, 2027	Prestige	Early Talkie; some scenes shot north of Snook Haven
Mar 12-13	Writers Festival and Book Fair	VHI sponsored
Apr 9, 2027	Baseball: Venice in 9 innings	Harry Klinkhamer

Support Venice Museums. Promote our rich history. Promote saving and restoring Venice's historic resources. **Become a Champion of Vintage Venice- Join VHI Today**

Coming Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
Oct 15, 2006	4-6	Doctor and I Book Release Tea	San Marco Hotel
Oct 31-Nov 1	10-4	Venice Main Street Art Fest (Volunteers needed)	Venice Ave
Nov 7, 2026	10-3	Old Betsy Birthday Bash (Volunteers needed)	Old Betsy and Venice History Museums
Jan 30-31, 2027	1-5	Venice Main Street Craft Fest (Volunteers needed)	Venice Ave
Jan 14, 2027	11:30-2:30	VHI Annual Luncheon	Mission Valley CC
Mar 7, 2027	2-4	VHI Members Only Event/Annual Meeting	Venice Train Depot
Mar 12, 2027	10-5?	VHI Sponsored Writers Fest (Volunteers needed)	Venice Library
Mar 13, 2027	10-3	VHI Sponsored Book Fair (Volunteers needed)	Blalock Park



Old Betsy



Today's Version

[Return to Contents](#)

Membership

VHI would love to have you as a member! Our volunteer organization believes in what we do which includes supporting City of Venice Museums and other Historic Resources, providing lectures, and publishing books on our rich local history! Starting in 2026, VHI is offering a new membership level of Associate Member Single and Duo. Check it out. Go to <https://veniceheritage.org/membership/> to learn more and join.

Learn more about the Venice History Museum and the Old Betsy Museum at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm0tC9YoVsY>

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



Our volunteers come in all ages



July 4 Lions Club Volunteers

[Return to Contents](#)

From the HRM

This summer we hit the height of our centennial celebrations. July 1 was the actual date of the city's 100th anniversary. A few days later, July 4, was the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country. The city went big for both and so did we. The City of Venice and Venice Main Street hosted an old-fashioned parade ending with a picnic in the Venice Community Center. We had the museum open that day with activities outside for the public. Old Betsy was in the parade and then settled into her home we're people could pop in to see her.

Then, on July 8 we led the city's participation in a national reading of the Declaration of Independence. Those in attendance were invited to pledge their lives, their freedoms, and their sacred honor by signing a copy of the Declaration. We also hosted the Florida Freedom Tour on July 23. This traveling exhibit on Florida history is housed in two semi-trailers crisscrossing the state. Visitors could explore one truck on early Florida history, then head to the second truck for more modern Florida history.

With thanks to Venice Heritage, their philanthropical support purchased new compact shelving for the Julia Cousins Laning and Dale Laning Archives and Research Center. These additional units from SpaceSaver will increase our storage capacity in the objects room by 40%. The Venice Area Historical Society has also been very generous. They recently donated \$5,000 to the city to continue our digitization of the *Venice Gondolier* newspapers.

This month the Venice History Museum is changing its schedule. Since dinosaurs roamed the Earth, the museum was open Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. But starting this month, we are switching to a Wednesday-Thursday-Friday schedule. Our Saturday seasonal hours will remain the same. We expect this will allow more people here on long weekends to visit us.

As we head into the fall, we are excited to be working with Venice Heritage to celebrate Old Betsy's 100th anniversary. The city's original fire truck arrived here from Moore Haven on November 4, 1926. On November 7, 2026 the Old Betsy Birthday Bash will include music, kids activities, food trucks, antique fire equipment, and more. And the Holiday Open House will take place again this December 12.

As high season starts to kick in, we look forward to seeing many of you at the museum or at different Venice Heritage events.



Gary, Harry, Dorothy, Teri and Picasso at the annual Meeting



Harry Klinkhamer, Venice Historical Resources Manager

Myths and Realities of Hurricanes in Venice

For nearly a century, residents of Venice, Florida have shared a curious belief: that the spirits of the ancient Calusa Indians protect the city from the worst of the Gulf's hurricanes. It's a story told on porches, in classrooms, and even in real estate brochures—a comforting idea that Venice is somehow shielded by forces older than the city itself. But like all enduring myths, this one reveals as much about the people who tell it as it does about the storms that shape the region.

The Calusa, who inhabited Southwest Florida for more than 2,000 years, were a powerful maritime society deeply attuned to the rhythms of the coast. While there is no historical evidence that they believed their spirits would guard future generations from hurricanes, the myth reflects a modern desire to feel connected to the land's ancient past. In a place where storms are a seasonal reality, the idea of protective ancestors offers emotional reassurance and a sense of continuity.

Yet the scientific record tells a more grounded story. Venice has indeed avoided many catastrophic, direct hurricane landfalls, but this pattern is explained by meteorology, not mysticism. The city's position along Florida's central Gulf Coast places it in a zone where storms often curve north toward Tampa Bay or veer south toward Charlotte Harbor and Naples. Atmospheric steering currents, the shape of the coastline, and sheer statistical chance have all played roles in Venice's relative good fortune.

Still, Venice is far from untouched. Major storms such as Hurricane Donna (1960), Hurricane Charley (2004), Hurricane Irma (2017), and Hurricane Ian (2022) brought damaging winds, flooding, and widespread power outages. These events serve as reminders that while Venice may appear lucky, it is not immune. The myth of protection persists not because it is literally true, but because it offers meaning in the face of uncertainty.

Ultimately, the Calusa-spirit story is less about meteorology and more about identity. It reflects how communities use folklore to make sense of natural forces beyond their control. In Venice, the myth endures because it blends history, hope, and the human need to believe that the place we call home is special. The reality is that preparedness—not protection—is what keeps Venice resilient. But the myth, like the storms themselves, remains part of the city's cultural landscape.



Another perk when you become a Member of VHI is our annual Members Only Event. That and other events are being planned for 26-27. The August Newsletter highlights these events.

Join now and enjoy our fall events. Venice Heritage will have its own events for the Venice Centennial. Go to Membership for more information.

And, don't forget the Second Friday speaker series supported by Venice Heritage. This ongoing event is free to the public, so you can bring your friends.

Photo Page



Venice History Museum at Night



Harry and Jon from the Museum and Archives and Teri and Terry from VHI at the Venice Museum Open House



Harry talks to a listener after a library lecture

Did you know...

The **BLE** launched a major nationwide campaign during 1926-1927. The *Venice News* was created to promote Venice's activities, progress, culture, and potential to attract new investors from the North.



Old Betsy decked out for the holiday



Q enjoys a drink from the new fountain

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[Return to Contents](#)