

Section III – Supporting Documentation

With the United States's entry into World War II, the country's military ramped up the training of forces for active duty. The State of Florida provided an ideal location for training due to its plenty of open space and consistently good weather conditions. Land developer Finn Casperson approached the U.S. Army about land available near the City of Venice for a base. After surveying the area, the military opened a training base in 1943 for pilots and air support personnel just south of Venice. In order to improve staff morale, the new commanding officer established in 1944 several creature comforts, including improved living conditions, a church, library, and several service clubs to provide entertainment. The student pilots stationed at the Venice Army Air Base enjoyed music, dancing, movies, and other entertainment in a facility that was built in 1942 but was not purposed until 1944. This building was known as the Student Officers' Club.

During its brief existence, the Venice Army Air Base grew from an initial plan of 900 military personnel stationed there to over 5,000. Soldiers, pilots, and mechanics were trained in engine maintenance, flying, camouflage, and gas warfare, among other military needs. Several buildings in the city were also repurposed to support the air base. Dr. Fred Albee's Florida Medical Center was converted to the base hospital. The Venice Golf Club Clubhouse became the Officer's Lounge. The former Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers's boat docks became the station for the Army's rescue ship to retrieve crashed pilots in the Gulf of Mexico.

At the close of World War II, surplus military property was transferred to the War Assets Administration for disposal. This included equipment, land, and other property owned by the United States military. The War Assets Administration transferred the Venice Army Air Base to the City of Venice to be used as a municipal airport. Other equipment and assets were also transferred over to the city, including the Student Officers' Club.

Some of the structures on the base were relocated, including for City Hall, another for the Englewood Post Office, the church for a Catholic chapel, and other structures for residences in Nokomis and Englewood. Many more were used for training purposes by the Venice Fire Department. One became the home of the Venice Little Theatre. A few of the residences remain, but the rest have since been demolished.

By 1947, the City of Venice was already making plans to incorporate the Student Officers' Club and the Base Library into facilities for a trailer park. At the November 1, 1949 City Council meeting, the City approved establishing a mobile home park with the Student Officers' Club serving as a recreational facility and the library as public washrooms and a laundry room. The trailer park opened the following year. City regulations prohibited trailer parks in the city, so the property was owned and operated by Venice but was in unincorporated Sarasota County. It was not until 1969 that it was brought into the city's borders.

From the beginning the former officers' club hosted a myriad of events not always tied to the trailer park. One of the more common activities was hosting weekly dances for the general public. Other clubs took advantage of the meeting space including Veterans of World War I. On occasion, the building hosted weddings and wedding anniversaries. Up until 1963, the building was home to the non-sectarian Friendly Bible Church. For trailer park residents and visitors, the building served as a meeting room, recreation center, and auditorium. There was a regular schedule of craft classes,

lectures, bazaars, and concerts by trailer park musicians. The former library would eventually be torn down, leaving the former Student's Officers' Club as the last remaining building from the former Venice Army Air Base still in its original location.

In addition to the structure, the Historic and Architectural Board are recommending including the following original objects to the nomination:

- Wooden floors in main room
- Kitchen sink
- Mailboxes in entryway