

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PRELIMINARY SITE INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

## FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

This questionnaire is intended only to provide preliminary information about the property to the Bureau of Historic Preservation.

### Name and Location of Property

Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey  
Winter Circus Quarters  
1401 Ringling Drive  
Venice, FL 34285

### Name and Address of Owner(s)

City of Venice  
401 W. Venice Ave  
Venice, FL  
34285-2006

County: Sarasota

I support ☐ oppose ☐ this effort to list or seek a determination of eligibility for listing my property in the National Register of Historic Places (optional).

Has it ever been moved? No ☐ Yes 1959 (year)

Date of Construction or Significant Associations  
1960 to 1992

Owner's Signature & Date  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

### Type of Property:

☒ Archaeological or Historic Site  
☐ Residential Building  
☐ Public Building  
☒ Commercial Building  
☐ Other (Describe) \_\_\_\_\_

### Original Use:

Circus Winter Quarters and Performance Arena

### Present Use:

Unoccupied

Physical Description (Indicate basic design and construction, and general condition at present time.)  
Please see attached description on page 2:

### Why is the property significant?

Please see attached page 2:

### Enclosures:

9 Current Photos (original, required)  
4 Historic Photos (if available,  
photocopy acceptable)  
2 Location Map (required)  
1 Proof of Ownership (Property  
Appraiser record or notarized  
letter, required)

### Name and Address of Person Submitting

Larry Ivey  
120 Base Ave E.  
Venice, FL 34285  
Telephone (Daytime)  
(941) 412-1642  
Email iveytl@earthlink.net

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### STAFF ONLY

Appears to be: Eligible, FNP \_\_\_\_\_ / Ineligible \_\_\_\_\_, due to \_\_\_\_\_ / Insufficient Info \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
date sent Initial/date

**Physical Description** (indicate basic design and construction and general condition at present time)

There are two structures remaining on the site. One is a small octagonal masonry building with metal roof supported by aluminum trusses in a tension ring/compression ring configuration. This was the famous animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams (GG-W) "Big Cat" training ring. The metal roofing is heavily deteriorated and is in the process of being removed for safety and will be replaced.

The other structure is the 60,000 square foot arena building built in 1960 by John Ringling North and Art Consello, it was the Winter Quarters for Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey (RBBB) for over 30 years with original seating for 5,000 spectators. Construction consists of a main arena rehearsal hall with a staging area on the east end and a second floor office area at the west end. The steel roof trusses are supported by steel columns on a 24 inch to 18 inch concrete foundation. The roof is plywood with a fibrous covering. The walls are masonry block to four feet with plywood sheeting to the roof line. Due to lack of maintenance for over 15 years, the roof is in very poor condition and some elements have rotted away leaving open holes. This has lead to decay of the plywood siding and the second level flooring. However, the steel support structure has been assessed by engineers as being sound. The roof and all wood will be removed for safety, leaving the steel frame work in place available for future restoration. The arena rehearsal hall and grand stand were originally designed as an open structure and used that way until sides were added later. The arena can be used this way again until it is restored.

**Why is the property significant?**

At the conclusion of their 1959 season, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus moved their winter home from Sarasota to their new Venice Florida quarters. The 60,000 square foot Circus Arena was constructed on site at 1401 Ringling Drive in Venice, the same used by the Sparks Bros. circus in 1947. It has seating for an audience of 4500 to 5000, with space for a workshop, costume sewing and Clown Alley. On November 29, 1960 the circus train rolled into Venice.

From 1962 to 1992, RBBB developed, practiced and presented its world premiere of "The Greatest Show on Earth" at the Venice Circus Arena each year. From this arena they would send out the Red Team, the Blue Team and the Gold Team around the world to perform circus for "boys and girls of all ages"! The 1963 Desilu Productions filmed a television series called "The Greatest Show on Earth" at the Venice arena with Jack Palance as circus boss and actress Tuesday Weld as a star aerialist. A host of great circus stars and acts made their American debuts in Venice Florida, including Gunther Gebel-Williams, animal trainer; Tito Gaona, trapeze artist; Michu, the world's smallest human; and the mighty elephant King Tusk.

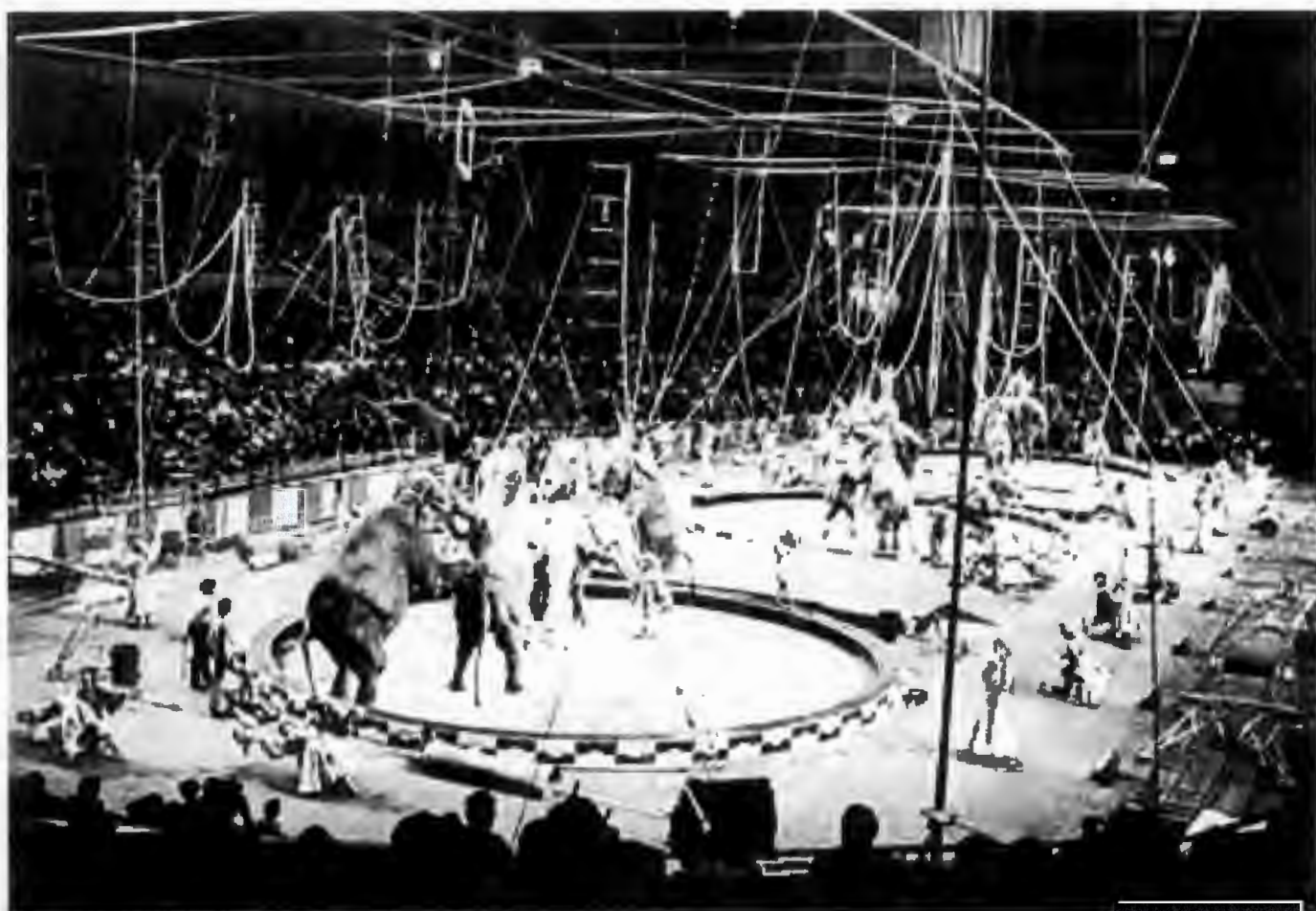
Because the cost associated with transporting and erecting tents had become prohibitive, the Venice Arena is said to have saved the RBBB Circus by providing an arena type event center like the ones they would perform in around the world. Deterioration of the rail spur between Sarasota and Venice over the years forced the circus to move it quarters to Tampa after 1992, thus ending many years of the circus presence in Sarasota County.







NEW RINGLING BARN—Modern arena has seat sections which raise.  
Sarasota Herald-Tribune photo)



IT'S A

# FIRST



**RINGLING BROS. Barnum & Bailey**

# CIRCUS

**FOR THE FIRST TIME OPENS  
THE SEASON AT IT'S WINTER  
QUARTERS IN VENICE**

## JAN. 8, 9, 10

**5 WONDERFUL SHOWS!**

FOR THE FIRST TIME

### *The Gondolier*

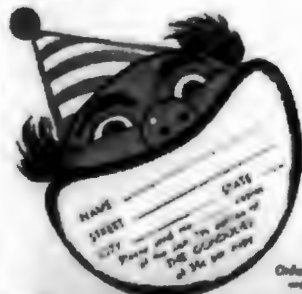
OFFERS IT'S READERS A

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**GOOGLE EARTH MAP 2010**

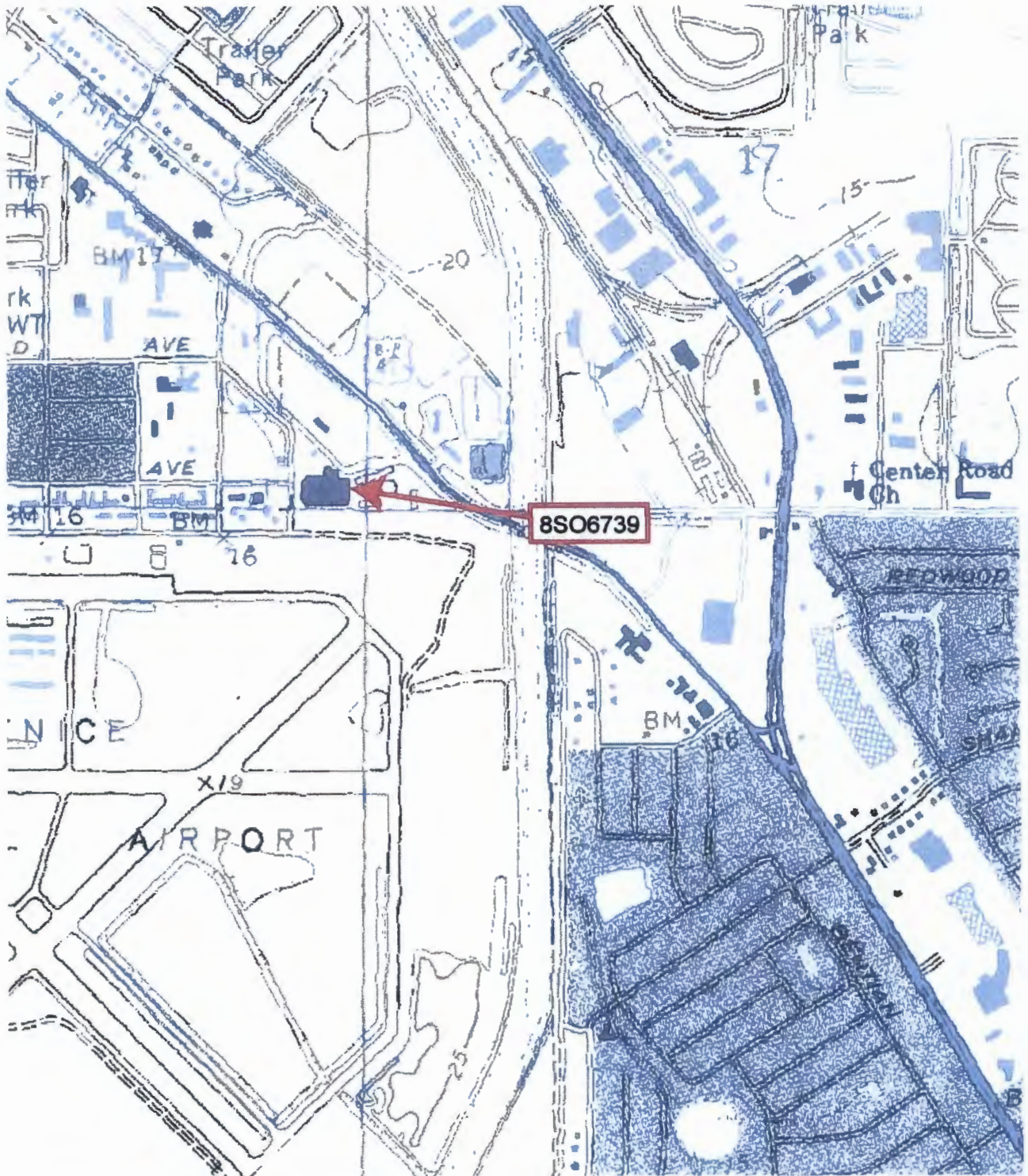
Venice, Florida  
Imagery date: 12/19/2007





## USGS MAP

Township 39 South, Range 19 East, Section 18  
1975 Venice LABINS mrg2520.tif





# Sarasota County Property Appraiser

PA@SC-PA.com

**Bill Furst**

## 2013 Detail Information for Parcel 0430-09-0007

### Ownership

VENICE CITY OF  
401 W VENICE AVE  
VENICE, FL, 34285-2006

[Incorrect Mailing Address?](#)

### Situs Address

[1401 RINGLING DR, VENICE, FL 34285](#)

### Parcel Description

BEG AT SE COR SEC 18-39-19 TH W  
432.39 FT TH N 458.22 FT ALG E  
R/W LINE OF RINGLING DR TH E  
166.54 FT TH NELY 132.22 FT TH  
NLY 320.46 FT TH SELY 750 FT

### Parcel Characteristics

Land Area: 511,220 Sq. Ft. (11.7 acres +/-)  
Incorporation: CITY OF VENICE  
Delineated District: N/A  
Subdivision Code: [0000](#)  
Use Code: 2810  
Sec/Twp/Rge: [18-39S-19E](#)  
Census: 121150024023  
Zoning: CI

### Associated Personal Property

No Personal Property

### 2013 Preliminary Values (Subject to Change)

Just (Market) Value: \$2,969,800  
Land Value: \$2,269,800  
Improvement Value: \$700,000  
Assessed Value: \$2,969,800  
Homestead: No  
Exemptions: \$2,969,800  
Total Taxable: \$0

### Improvements (Preliminary)

Total Building Area: 73,586  
Living Area: 69,055  
Living Units:  
Bed / Bath: Bed/0 Bath  
Pool: No  
Year Built: Various (5 card parcel)

## Transfer History

Transaction Date Recorded Consideration Transaction Qual. Code Instrument # Seller/Grantor Instrument Type

7/7/1948 \$100 X2 [0240/0352](#) QC

[Show Transaction Qual. Codes](#)

[Show Instrument Types](#)

## Exemptions

Year Code Description	Amount
2013 569 MUNICIPAL PROPERTY	

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Sarasota County Property Appraiser - Ph. 941.861.8200 Fax. 941.861.8260 - 2001 Adams Lane, Sarasota, FL, 34237 - [Disclaimer](#)





Circus Arena Site - Arena in back left, GG-W bldg front right

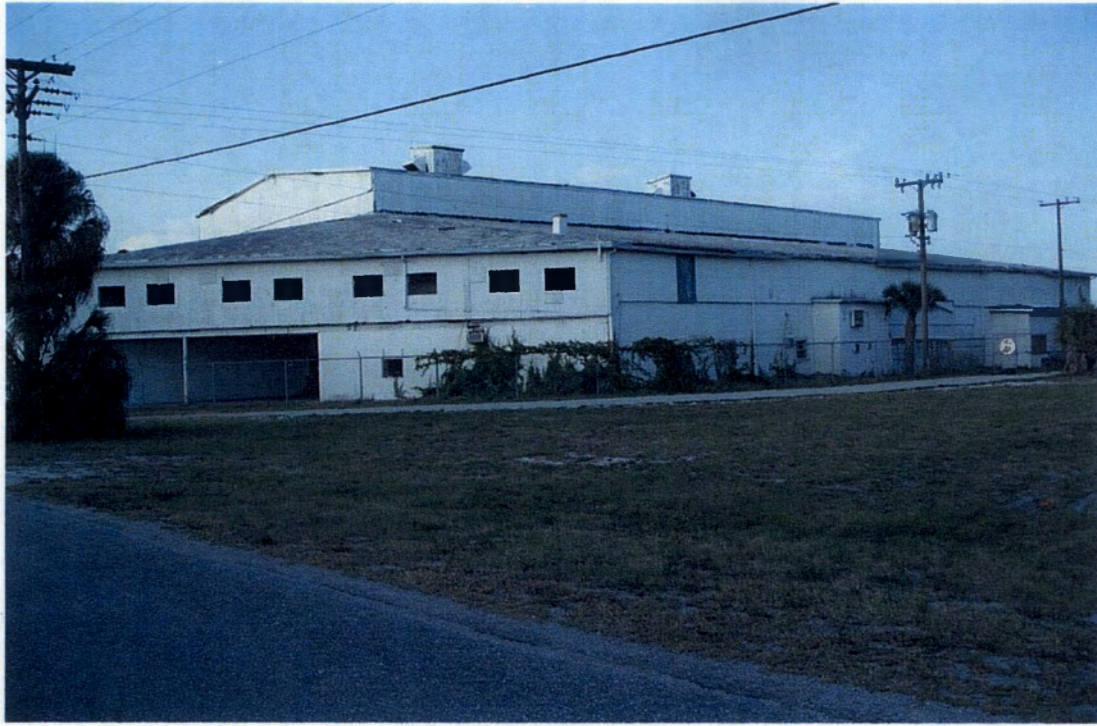


Circus Arena Roof area from Ringling Drive toward US-41



Arena view from Ringling Dr. - North-west side





Arena view from Ringling Dr. - South-west side

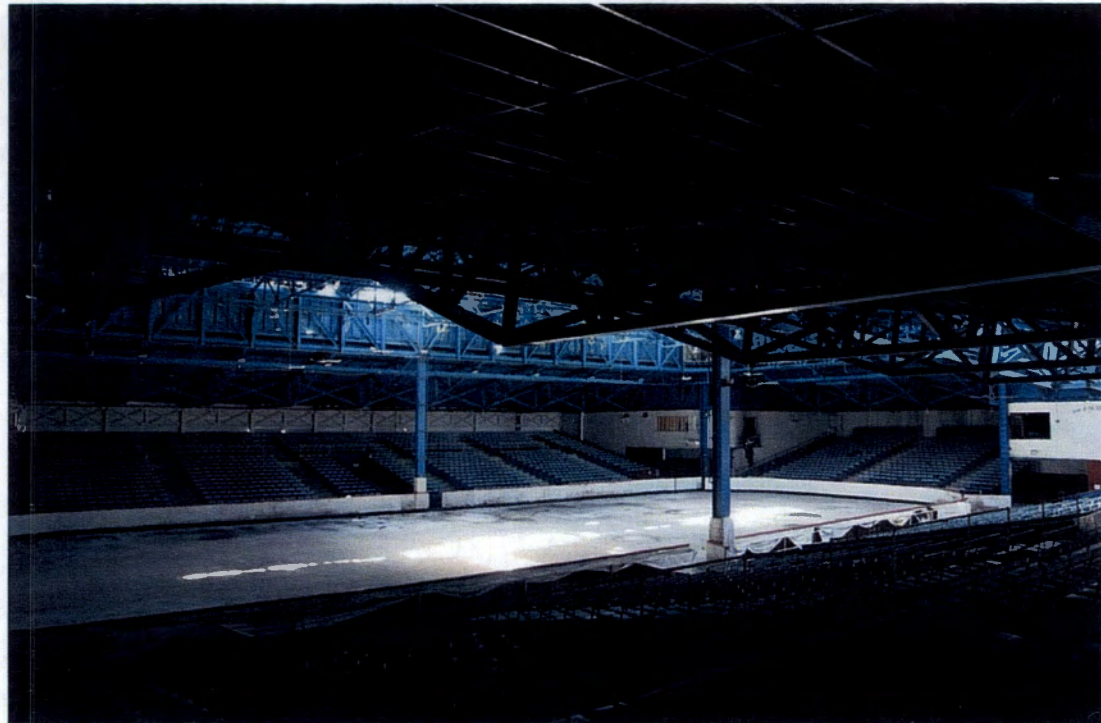


Arena view from US-41 - North-east side



Inside Arena view looking west





Inside Arena view looking south



Gunther Gebel-Williams training ring, east & south sides



Gunther Gebel-Williams training ring, west & north sides