



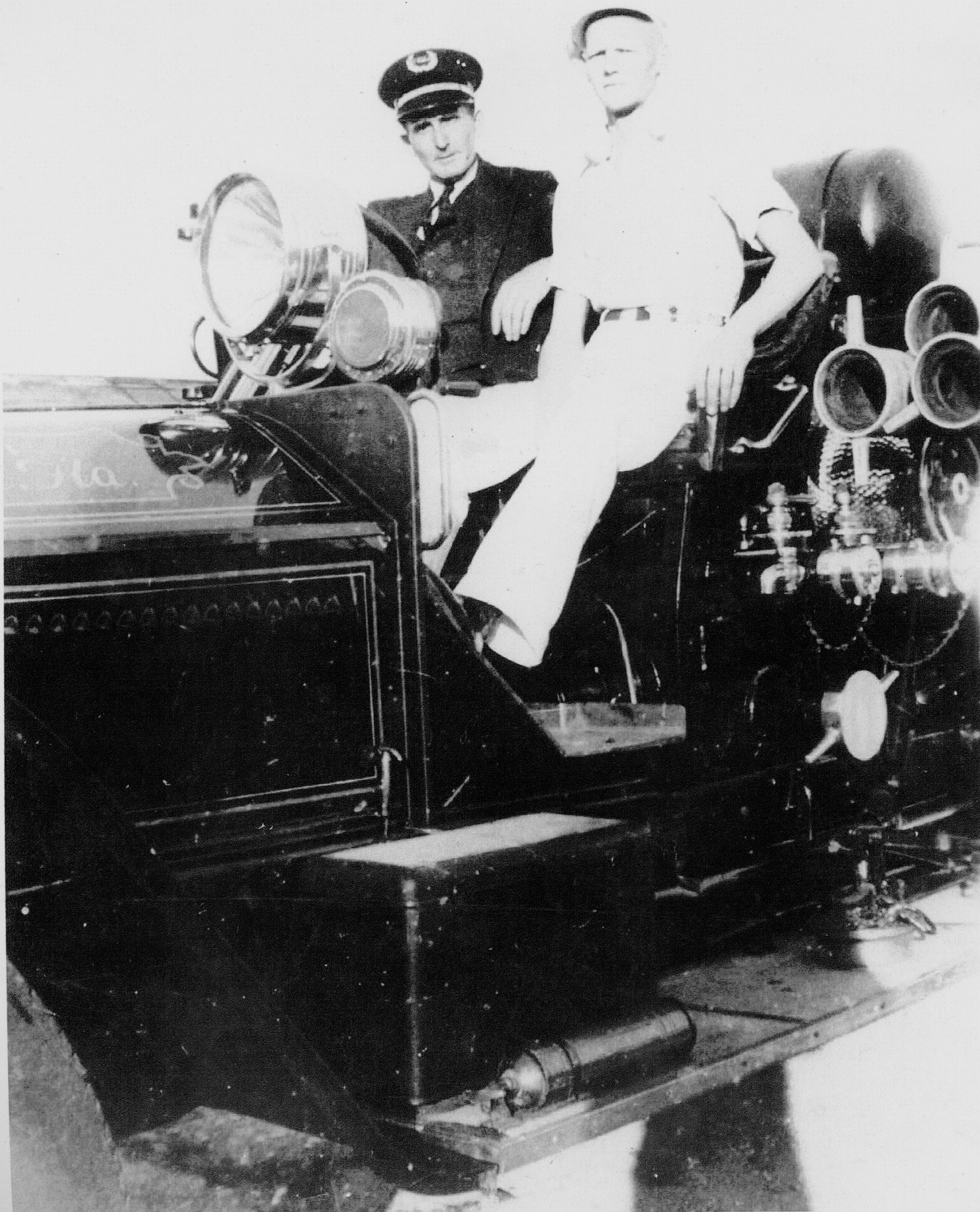








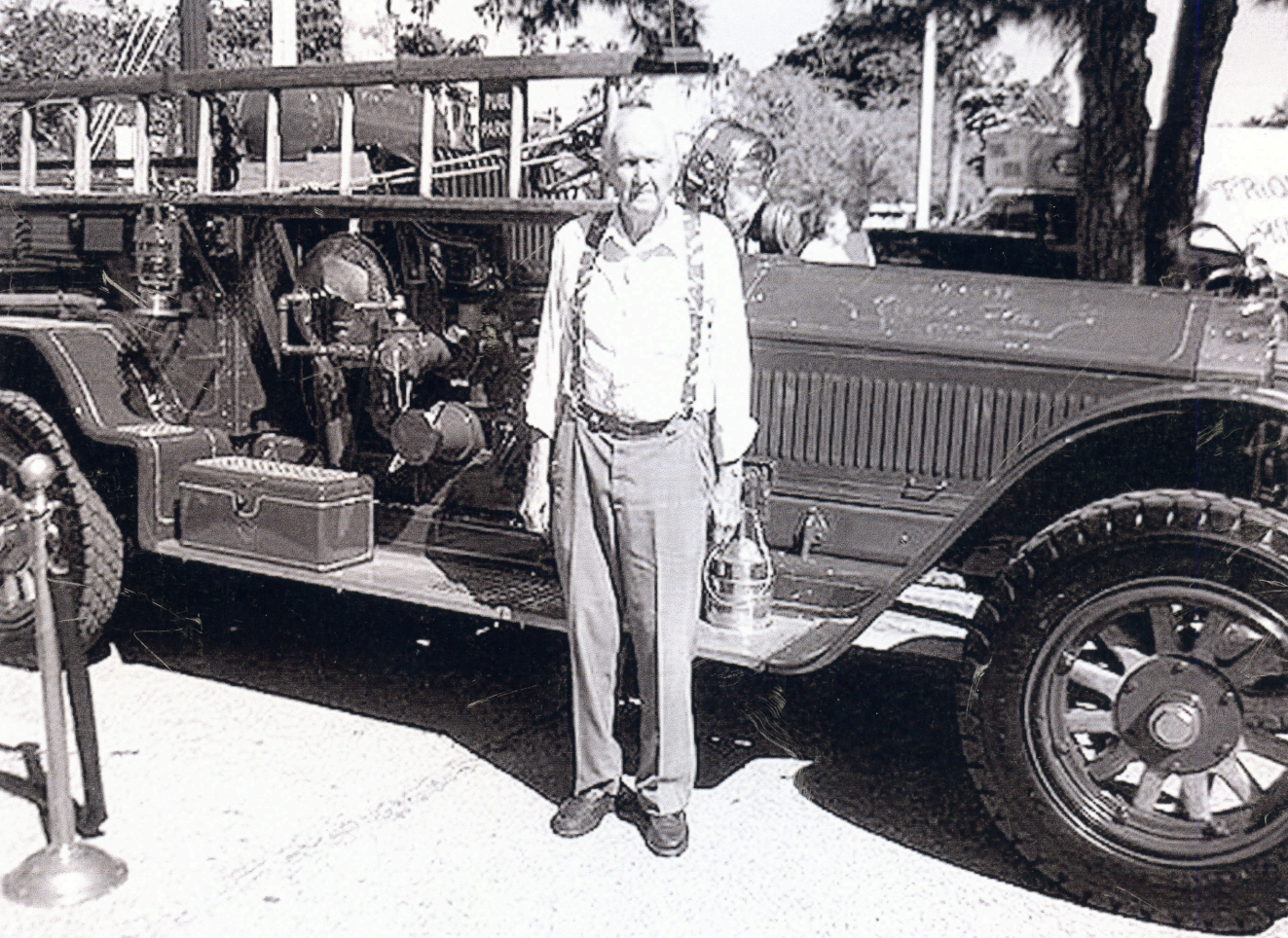
Chief Walter B. Surls and Unidentified Man on Old Betsy - ca. 1935



















Heading for the Festival of States Parade and
Firematics (Old Betsy won hands down!)



Old Betsy needs a new home

By Douglas A. Bolduc
Staff Writer

Venice's first fire truck is prominently displayed on the cover of the city's 1998-99 budget book while in reality "Old Betsy" spends most of its days in relative obscurity. Making matters worse, the 1926 American La France pumper truck soon will be without a permanent home.

Old Betsy's current residence, Venice Fire Station 2 on North Grove Street, is about to be renovated. The city and Sarasota County have agreed to move a county ambulance and rescue personnel into station 2 and station 1 on Harbor Drive. The pro-

Please see BETSY, 2



Staff photo by Paul Wimmer

Venice Firefighter Robert Fiorentino backs "Old Betsy" into its current home at Fire Station 2 in Venice.

Karen Angle, who owns better than it ever has."

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BETSY

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ject aims to improve rescue response in the city. Venice Fire Chief Mike Beagle said the work will cost the station two bays. One of the bays belongs to Betsy.

Beagle is trying to determine where the truck will wait out the work. He said the city utilities department has offered space at the Eastside Wastewater Treatment Plant and the public works department has said Betsy could stay in the city barn. Beagle said neither location is ideal and added if the truck were sent to the city barn it would have to be covered to prevent it from getting dirty.

Venice Historical Resources Director Dorothy Korwek said the city's historical commission supports the eastside area as a short-term solution.

The most important issue though is finding a permanent location for Old Betsy, Beagle said. He said once the renovation is complete, Betsy could move back into station 2. One drawback is the VFD would have to leave the station's command car, with its high priced communication equipment, outside.

Other potential spots Beagle's heard mentioned include areas adjacent to the Venice Avenue retention pond, the Venice Train Depot, Venice City Hall, Vinyl Tech and the Triangle Inn.

Beagle said he'd like to see Old Betsy placed next to the Triangle Inn.

He said marrying the historic vehicle to the building dedicated to Venice's past makes sense.

Korwek said the combination is hardly a blissful match.

She said land near the inn was considered in the past, but a com-

puter drawing showed the structure would overpower the inn.

"It isn't enough land for a garage," Korwek said.

Korwek said the Venice Historical Commission favors having a display garage near the depot, but she is skeptical because the improvement project is taking so long. She thinks she'll have to recommend city leaders use city-owned land along Granada Avenue as the garage site.

Beagle said wherever she goes, Betsy will need secure housing. He said there is no way to lock the truck and Betsy's maintenance costs, which the department already budgets, would soar if it were left outside. Korwek said the truck also needs to be near a Venice fire station so the VFD can easily continue the vehicle's upkeep.

The VFD's tender treatment has kept Betsy in good condition. The truck, with its new transmission and engine, is a parade favorite. Beagle said in the late 1980s Betsy won a water-pumping contest against other antique trucks at a fire apparatus muster in Tampa.

Korwek estimates a garage would cost \$30,000.

"It's not cheap to build a garage," Korwek said. "Especially a long, tall garage."

Beagle said it would be impossible to build the facility using funds from the VFD budget. He said he'd like to see a local group donate a building or, if possible, see the city use 1-cent sale tax funds for the project.

Until a site and a money source are found, the old girl's future will continue to be uncertain.

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