



Chairman, Historic Architectural Review Board
401 West Venice Avenue
Venice, FL 34285

May 6, 2025

Dear Chairman,

The Venice Area Historical Society previously nominated the Society for the City's 2025 Legacy Award. At a public meeting to consider the Society's application, the only one received, the Board Vice Chair pointed out the Society had previously received the award in 2006. She remarked that the City's policy does not mention the possibility of a subsequent award for a recipient and wondered aloud what the Society had accomplished since 2006 to merit another award.

The Society welcomes the opportunity to answer that question and respectfully submits this amended application and its attachments in support of the application.

The Legacy Award for Preserving Venice History speaks of a group demonstrating a contribution to preserving the past in Venice through collecting and preserving objects and records, bringing awareness to buildings, places and individuals from Venice's past, and educating the public about aspects of Venice history. There is no reason an organization could not be entitled to a second award, upon a showing of appropriate justification. The amended application demonstrates the myriad accomplishments of the Society since 2006, recognized by City, County, and State preservation groups, which justify the 2025 Legacy Award.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Wright
Frank Wright, President



VENICE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

APPLICATION FOR LEGACY AWARD

The Venice Historic Preservation League, doing business as the Venice Area Historical Society (VAHS), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, was founded in 1991 to celebrate and preserve the history of Venice, Florida and its surrounding areas.

The mission of VAHS is to promote public awareness and understanding of the historic heritage of Florida, Sarasota County, and the Venice area, within the context of our nation's history, and to encourage inquiry and research into this history. The historical society achieves these goals by focusing on **Education** through its Betty Intagliata Lecture Series, the Speakers Bureau, and its VAHS Scholarship Program; the **Depot Campus** with the 1927 Historic Venice Train Depot, the Circus Car Museum, and the Caboose; and its **Community Engagements** focusing on Pop-Up Meet-Up Events, the VAHS Traveling Exhibitions, *The Venice Express* newsletter, Certificates of Distinction, the Plaque Program, and Art Installations.

EDUCATION is paramount to our mission. VAHS sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and initiatives such as the

- **Betty Intagliata Lecture Series**

- During Betty Intagliata's presidency (2003 – 2008), she became pro-active in soliciting the support of others to become speakers on various aspects of Venice history. She and others, who were willing to assist in this task, became an informal team spreading the word about Venice history among local area groups;
- Named for her efforts, The Betty Intagliata Lecture Series is an in-season monthly FREE lecture series offered to members, guests, and the public. Speakers are typically state-wide experts, with occasional presentations by national or local experts;
- Attendance averages 50-60 people per lecture; and
- As a thank you for her dedication, the Bill Jerve, Jr. Charitable Foundation has continued to provide permanent funding since 2016.

- **Speakers Bureau**

- A major impetus for this effort was the 100th Anniversary of Bertha Palmer's arrival in 1910 in what would become Sarasota County. As part of this celebration, the Speakers Bureau was underway with three VAHS members taking on the role of Bertha Palmer;
- The Speakers Bureau provides well-researched Venice-area history presentations for local organizations;
- Beginning with the 2010-2011 season, the attendance results reveal that for fourteen seasons to date (one and a half seasons were lost due to the pandemic), VAHS has provided speakers for 141 scheduled engagements with local groups, averaging fourteen speaker events per season;
- To date (since the 2010 season), VAHS has been hosted by sixty-nine clients, thirty of whom have booked our speakers more than once; and
- In the last two seasons, VAHS has averaged 906 attendees per season.

- **VAHS Scholarship**

- Established in 2025 to encourage the next generation to appreciate history and historic preservation;
- The scholarship is in the amount of \$2,500;
- Applicants are vetted by a committee; and
- Awarded to a graduating senior of Venice High School.

The **DEPOT CAMPUS** is our pride and joy. It is run by VAHS and its trained docents to provide an extensive history of Venice including the 1927 Historic Venice Train Depot, the Circus Car Museum, and the Caboose. Since November 2003, over 60,000 people have visited the 1927 Historic Venice Train Depot, and, since 2021, the refurbished Circus Car Museum.

- **The 1927 Historic Venice Train Depot**

- FREE VAHS docent-led tours are offered year-round throughout the depot allowing visitors a glimpse into the past and into the circus car with its vast collection of circus memorabilia; and
- Outreach to youth and other local organizations through grant-funded visits to the 1927 Historic Venice Train Depot.

- **The Circus Car Museum**

- In 2016, VAHS purchased an ideal car from the Florida Railroad Museum. Built as a sleeper by Pullman-Standard in 1953, it was owned by Ringling Bros. from 1978 to 1994. VAHS raised over \$350,000 to purchase, transport, and refurbish the train car;

- The car was rehabilitated at Uni-Glide Trailer Company in Venice. In January 2021, it was moved to the Depot and donated to Sarasota County for viewing by the public. VAHS then finalized and installed exhibits in the car and held a ribbon-cutting on February 23, 2023; and
- The museum includes:
 - three residences illustrating how performers lived on the circus train;
 - exhibits describing how “wintering” began in Venice, chronicling Irvin Feld’s revitalization of the circus in Venice, including the creation of Clown College, recounting the special partnership between the circus and the City of Venice, and highlighting retired circus performers and staff who stayed in the area, making Venice a special place to live;
 - archival video footage, including the 1989 arrival of the circus train (Blue Unit), excerpts from Clown College 20th Anniversary, a TV documentary with Dick Van Dyke, a blessing of the circus train in Venice, and elephants in the 1990 Venice Christmas Parade; and
 - a timeline of relevant events since the circus’s departure.

- **The Caboose**

- Another important aspect of the Depot Campus is the former Louisville & Nashville caboose. It was donated to Sarasota County by CSX, and it was restored by the Miley Team as a Seaboard caboose. The interior was previously used as an office by VAHS;
- Work has begun on the refurbishment of the interior of the caboose by moving the VAHS Collection and office equipment to an offsite facility. Now a clean slate, the floor will be replaced, the interior will be repainted, and new air conditioning will be installed. New showcases will be added to display historic items from the VAHS Collection and educational information panels will be hung;
- Once complete, the caboose will be open to the public and become another highlight of the docent-led tours; and
- There will be an official ribbon cutting ceremony on March 27, 2027, to celebrate the depot’s centennial.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

- **Pop-Up Meet-Up Events** – Established in 2024, members and guests visit local historic venues or gathering spots for an informal history lesson and the chance to meet like-minded preservationists;
- **VAHS Traveling Exhibition** – Established in 2024, the exhibitions allow the historical society to branch out into the community, creating displays utilizing historic items and memorabilia from its extensive collection for public engagement;
- ***The Venice Express*** - Quarterly VAHS newsletter which highlights recent events, articles with historical insights into buildings or places, and VAHS volunteer opportunities;
- **Certificate of Distinction** – Established in 2024, the certificate honors local organizations or businesses celebrating a significant milestone;
- **Plaque Program** - Mounted, custom-designed, informative plaques that recognize select historic buildings in Venice, particularly those that are distinctive and have been preserved or restored to reflect their original historic character. This program is funded through the generosity of the Ehrhart Family Foundation. From 1996 - 2022, seven buildings have a VAHS plaque;
- **Art Installations**
 - VAHS is helping VABI raise money to fund the new Circus Wall Mural; and
 - VAHS has partnered with VABI to commission and fund an all-bronze statue of John Nolen on a park bench reading his plan of the City of Venice. This important art installation will commemorate the Venice Centennial.

Awards

Since VAHS was awarded the 2006 Venice Heritage Award, the Society has received an abundance of local, County, and State awards for Organizational Achievement:

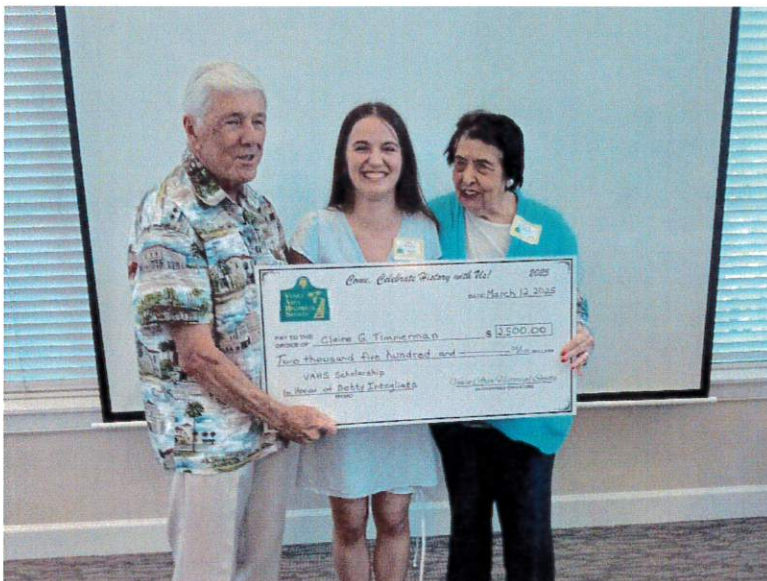
2024 Certificate of Recognition Sarasota County Volunteer Award

2023 Florida Preservation Award for Organizational Achievement from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation

EDUCATION



Betty Intagliata Lecture Series



2025 VAHS Scholarship winner



Speakers Bureau



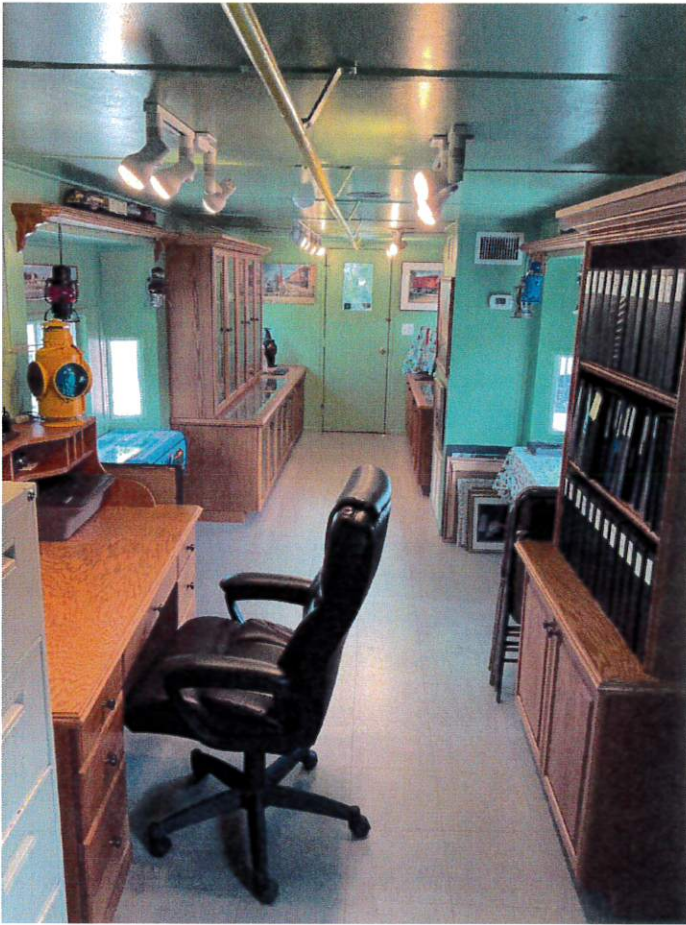
Exhibits



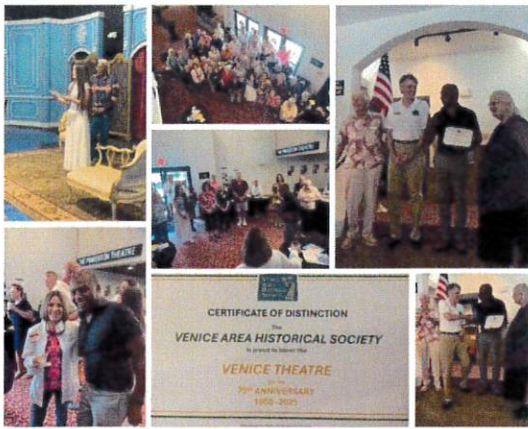
Depot Waiting Room II



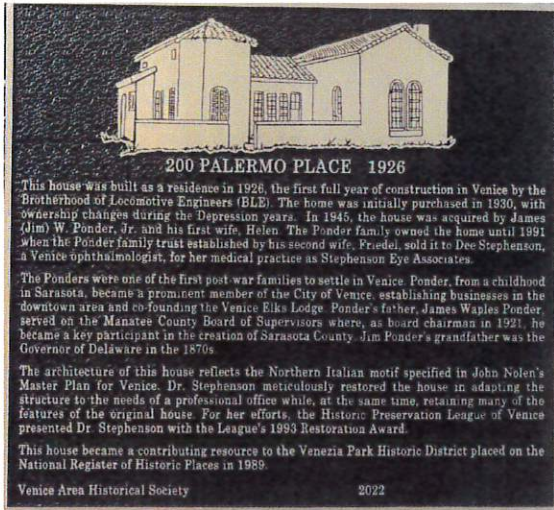
The Caboose and Circus Car



Interior of Caboose prior to current renovation

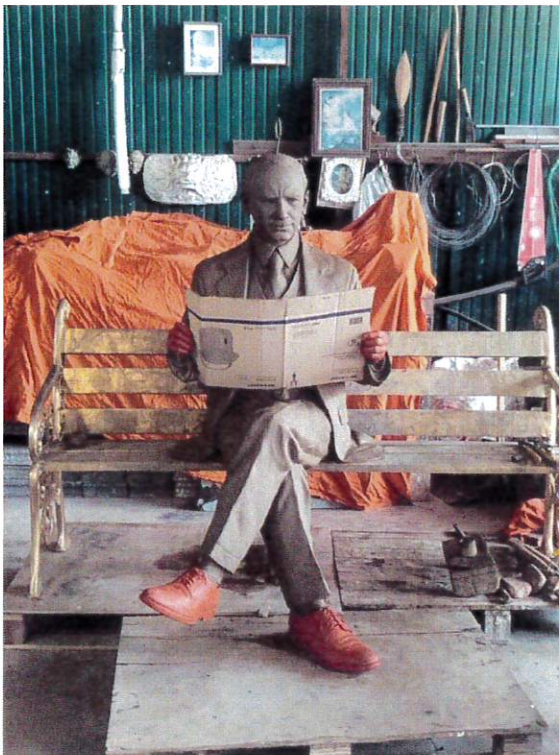


Certificate of Distinction



Plaque Program

Art Installations



Commissioned John Nolen Statue