

# Venice MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

*Preserving the Past...*

A Journey through the Venice Museum & Archives



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On the Island of Venice, Florida, sits a charming Mediterranean Revival building that holds the stories of the city's past. The Venice Museum and Archives (VMA), housed in the historic Triangle Inn, invites visitors to step back in time and explore the vibrant history of Venice and its neighboring communities. With its unique exhibits, passionate volunteers, and a mission rooted in preserving and sharing local heritage, the VMA is much more than a museum—it's a living repository of the city's soul.



(L to R) Harry Klinkhamer, Historical Resources Manager; Rhonda Rogers, Administrative Coordinator; Michelle Adams, Volunteer Docent

The VMA's origins date back to the 1970s when Betty Arnall, a Venice resident, began collecting artifacts and documents to preserve the city's history. Operating from a small closet in the Venice Library, with the help of dedicated volunteers, Betty accepted any historical item offered to her. As the collection grew, so did the need for space. The museum's journey took it from closets to City Hall and finally to the Triangle Inn, a historic 1927 boarding house that had been saved from demolition by community efforts. In 1991, the city acquired the building for one dollar and relocated it to its current site. Then, in 1994, after years of meticulous restoration, the Triangle Inn reopened as the Venice Museum and Archives; thus, standing as a testament to the community's commitment to preserve its heritage.

The moment you step into the VMA, you are greeted by friendly and knowledgeable volunteers who set the tone for your visit.





The self-guided tour starts with a main exhibit that offers a sweeping narrative of Venice’s history, from the Native American communities that once thrived in the area to the arrival of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Smaller galleries provide a deeper dive into specific topics. Highlights include:

The Dr. Fred Albee Exhibit, that celebrates the life of the orthopedic surgeon and early Venice developer. The Paleontological Collection, showcases fossils such as mammoth bones and shark teeth, and includes a nod to a mammoth skeleton discovered in Venice, that is now housed at the Smithsonian. Seasonal Exhibits, rotate annually providing fresh insights into Venice’s past. Current and upcoming themes include the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and The Historic Hotels of Venice.



As you wander the halls, you’ll also encounter the seasonal photo exhibit, including a tribute to Julia Cousins Laning, whose connection to the Triangle Inn runs deep. Her parents managed the boarding house in the 1930s, and later, she became a dedicated museum volunteer. Thanks to her generosity, the archives were moved across the street to the Julia Cousins Laning and Dale Laning Archives and Research Center in 2018.

The museum extends its mission into the community through outreach programs. Staff members regularly give talks to local organizations, sharing the stories and significance of Venice’s history. During the high season, the museum offers an array of tours to engage and educate visitors. These include three unique walking tours, and a bicycle tour. Each tour covers a different theme, ensuring there’s always something new to discover.

Looking ahead, the museum will re-establish its Holiday Open House in December 2025 in partnership with VABI (Venice Area Beautification Inc.) and the Blalock Park holiday lights display. This beloved tradition promises to be a festive celebration that brings history to life in a holiday setting.

While the city supports the museum’s day-to-day operations, its support organization, Venice Heritage, plays a critical role





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in funding special projects. This partnership has achieved remarkable milestones, such as raising more than \$800,000 for the restoration of the Lord Higel House, the oldest structure in Venice. Additionally, Venice Heritage is behind the latest project: a museum building for Old Betsy, the city's beloved 1926 fire truck. Scheduled for completion in early 2025, the building will provide a retirement home for Old Betsy, allowing her to remain a visible part of Venice's history while protecting her from wear and tear.

The group is also planning to launch a fundraising campaign to install high-end compact shelving in the archives, enabling the museum to preserve even more historical items in the same space. Efforts are currently underway with VABI to refresh the museum's landscaping, enhancing its curb appeal and welcoming ambiance.

As the City of Venice approaches its Centennial celebration in 2025, the museum is gearing up for a series of exciting events and projects to honor this milestone. Plans include hosting the Sarasota County competition for National History Day and creating exhibits that highlight the city's transition from a town to a city.

The Venice Museum and Archives thrives because of the people who care deeply about its mission. Volunteers are always welcome to join the team and help ensure the museum's continued success. Whether it's assisting with day-to-day operations or supporting major initiatives through Venice Heritage, there are countless ways to get involved. The Venice Museum and Archives could not function without the dedication of its volunteers. From welcoming visitors to assisting with research and preservation, these individuals are the lifeblood of the museum.



*Venice Gulf Coast Living Magazine is included in the Venice Archives Collection*

Whether you're a history enthusiast, a curious visitor, or a proud local, the Venice Museum and Archives offers a chance to connect with the stories that define this unique community.

Located at 351 Nassau Street South. To learn more, visit [VeniceMuseums.org](http://VeniceMuseums.org) and for information about tours or volunteering, check out [VeniceHeritage.org](http://VeniceHeritage.org) or contact the museum at 941-486-2490 or [venicemuseum@venicefl.gov](mailto:venicemuseum@venicefl.gov)

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