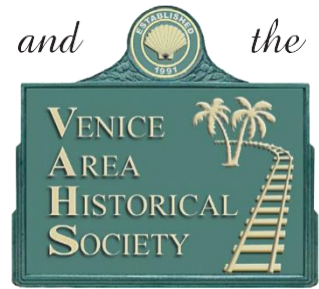


THE HISTORIC VENICE TRAIN DEPOT



The Historic Venice Train Depot, owned by Sarasota County, is the only surviving passenger station in the County. Located east of downtown Venice at 303 East Venice Avenue, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Since November 12, 2003, trained greeters and docents from the Venice Area Historical Society (VAHS) have provided tours of the Depot building and campus to visitors from around the world. On display in the Depot waiting rooms are informative panels and exhibits developed by VAHS, illustrating both Venice history and Depot history. The presence of VAHS at the Depot is a major effort in preserving and celebrating the Depot's history and its historically significant architecture.

To learn more about becoming a greeter or docent, please email:

information@veniceareahistoricalsociety.org

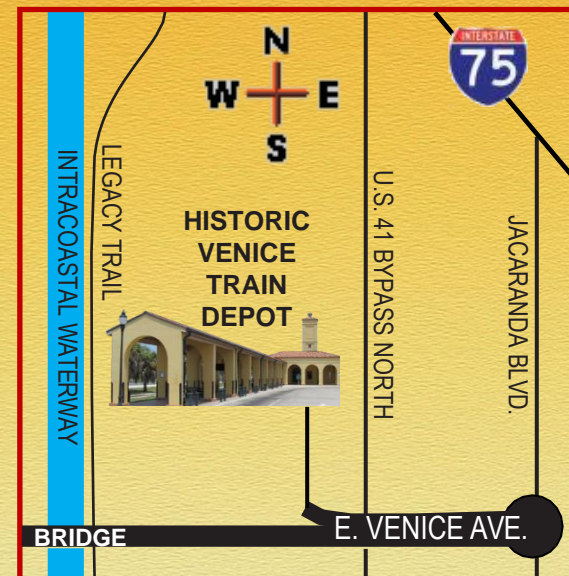


THE HISTORIC VENICE TRAIN DEPOT

303 E. Venice Ave., Venice, FL 34285.

From US 41 Bypass, turn right onto E. Venice Ave. Just before the bridge, bear right.

Continue through the Seaboard Ave intersection to the Depot on the right. The main entry is on the east side, just off the parking lot.



941-412-0151

veniceareahistoricalsociety.org

THE HISTORIC VENICE TRAIN DEPOT



**The only surviving
passenger station
in Sarasota County**

**Listed on the
National Register of
Historic Places**

**Located in the
Rollins W. Coakley
Railroad Park**

**For public visitation hours
and tour information, see:
veniceareahistoricalsociety.org**

For more information, contact the

Venice Area Historical Society

information@veniceareahistoricalsociety.org

Call 941-412-0151, or visit our website:

veniceareahistoricalsociety.org

VENICE TRAIN DEPOT TIMELINE

1927	Depot constructed by Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE). First passenger train departs March 27.
1928	BLE departs Venice.
1929	Venice becomes ghost town. Stock market crashes.
1933-1970	Kentucky Military Institute uses tracks and Depot.
1942-1945	Army personnel and materials arrive via Depot.
1960-1992	Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus train arrives/departs annually.
1964	Civil Rights Act ends segregation of trains and buses.
1971	Last passenger train leaves Depot April 30. Depot continues as freight depot.
1975	Depot closes.
1989	Depot listed on National Register of Historic Places.
1992-1993	Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus uses tracks to remove equipment.
1992-1997	Tracks used exclusively for freight.
1999	Sarasota County purchases Depot.
2003	Depot listed on City of Venice Register of Historic Places. \$2.3 million renovation completed. Restored Depot dedicated October 24. Depot classified as a Sarasota County Park. SCAT bus system hub moved to Depot November 1.
2005	Rollins W. Coakley Railroad Park dedicated March 22. Gunther Gebel-Williams Statue dedicated December 5.
2008	Legacy Trail Grand Opening, March 28.
2012	85th Anniversary of Depot celebrated. New displays unveiled.
2021	Refurbished Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey train car placed on Depot campus, January 28.

HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC VENICE TRAIN DEPOT

In 1903, a subsidiary of the Seaboard Air Line Railway brought the first train into what is now Sarasota County. In 1911, the tracks were extended 16.5 miles south at the request of Bertha Honoré Palmer, a Chicago businesswoman who was a major landholder in the area. Palmer named the new terminal Venice. The original train stop and siding were located near the current corner of St. Augustine Avenue and Tampa Avenue West.



In 1925, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) purchased land to develop the City of Venice according to a plan drafted by noted city planner John Nolen. The BLE recognized that a new depot would be essential for importing materials and attracting potential land buyers and visitors to Venice. Completed in 1927, the new Depot was the last structure built before the BLE closed operations in Venice in 1928.

Designed by the architectural firm of Walker and Gillette, the Depot is historically and architecturally significant. Built as a racially segregated building with two waiting rooms, it was 50 feet wide and 400 feet long. The Depot's architecture embodies the Mediterranean Revival style planned for the City of Venice. When opened on March 27, 1927, the Depot was heralded as the finest station on the Seaboard Air Line Railway.

Over the years, many station agents served at the Depot, handling reservations, ticketing, and freight. Two agents are remembered for their courteous service to the traveling public and their involvement in the Venice community: Devon Grady Hough (years of service in Venice 1949-1956) and Donald W. DeCoster, Sr. (1963-1975). Both had long careers with the Seaboard. The Donald W. DeCoster, Sr. Exhibit at the Depot illustrates the work of a station agent.

The last passenger train departed from the Depot in 1971, but freight traffic continued until 1997. In 1975, the Depot building closed, and subsequently fell into disrepair and decline. Sarasota County purchased the structure in 1999 and renovated it in 2002-2003. Dedicated on October 24, 2003, the restored Depot stands as a magnificent representation of the architecture of early Venice. The renovation added 40 feet on the south side of the building, and the additional space accommodates the Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) bus system hub at the Depot.



The original Depot cost \$47,500. The renovation cost \$2.3 million: \$1.4 million funded by the Florida Department of Transportation, \$825,000 by Sarasota County, and \$75,000 by the City of Venice.

On March 22, 2005, a portion of the current Depot campus was designated the Rollins W. Coakley Railroad Park. It was named for a former president of VAHS in recognition of his tireless efforts in preserving and restoring the Depot.



The park includes a red caboose, donated to Sarasota County by CSX Transportation, Inc. After extensive restoration, paid for by the County, the caboose was placed on the site in 2003.



Also in the park is the Gunther Gebel-Williams statue, created by Edward Kasprovicz and placed on the site in 2005. Gunther Gebel-Williams was a world-famous animal trainer and mega-star of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He arrived in the U.S. in 1968 and became known as "The Greatest Wild Animal Trainer of All Time" and "The Lord of the Rings." His training and performing techniques changed the American circus forever. Gebel-Williams' first Venice performance was in January 1969. He subsequently took up residence in Venice where he was beloved.

In 2021, the Venice Area Historical Society placed a refurbished Ringling Bros. train car on the Depot campus and donated it to Sarasota County. The car had its last brake check in Venice in 1993. Its exhibits portray Venice's circus history and circus legacy and include replicas of performers' living quarters on the train.



THE DEPOT'S ROLE IN THE HISTORY OF VENICE

The 1927 Depot was the entry point for three institutions that influenced Venice's growth and development in the twentieth century.

In 1932, the Kentucky Military Institute (KMI) chose Venice as its winter headquarters. From 1933 to 1970, the KMI cadets arrived by train at the Depot after New Year's Day and left around Easter. Family members and friends came to Venice to visit and enjoy the mild winter weather.



In 1942, the U. S. Army established the Venice Army Air Base and utilized it until 1945. Its facilities were able to accommodate up to 6,000 people, and some 22,000 personnel were trained there. The railroad Depot was a prime entry point for people and material during the war, thereby playing a vital role in our nation's history.



From 1960 to 1992, Venice was the winter headquarters of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Each winter, the circus train came to Venice and stayed for a month or two while performers prepared for a new season of acts in the Venice Circus Arena. Although the Depot had closed in 1975, the railroad tracks and Depot property were used by the circus during its winter stay in Venice until 1993 when the remaining circus equipment was removed from the Arena.



Photographs courtesy of Michael Radomski, Venice Museum and Archives, and George Miller.

(Revised: 9/20/2021)