

Journal and Newsletter of the
Triangle Inn Association

Venice Area Journal

July 2009

Association News

Archives News and Features

Activities and Announcements

(Local Historical Organizations)

Venice Area History Articles

National Volunteer Week Awards



Bob Briner accepts certificate from Mayor Ed Martin

The City of Venice celebrated National Volunteer Week (April 19 – 25, 2009) with a ceremony at the downtown gazebo on Tuesday, April 21, 2009. Mayor Ed Martin recognized the following Association members for their volunteer efforts in the

community: Bob Briner, Chuck Ford, and Bill Gallagher for their work at the Archives; and Dot Fuhrmeister, Betty Intagliata, Jerry Madden, and George Youngberg for their work at the Venice Train Depot on behalf of the Venice Area Historical Society. The volunteer recognition project

was a joint venture of the Venice Gondolier and Venice MainStreet. Volunteers recognized were selected by drawing from names submitted by the Archives and Historical Society.

Open House at Home of Sid and Carolyn Shrauger



Carolyn and Sid Shrauger

On Sunday, May 17, 2009 Sid and Carolyn Shrauger hosted an afternoon tour of their historic home in Venezia Park. About 20 Association members accepted the invitation and enjoyed wine, cheese, and fruit refreshments. Those attending not only enjoyed the opportunity to view a 1920s home, but also enjoyed the opportunity to converse with fellow history buffs.



**Standing: Carolyn Shrauger, Dorothy Korwek, and Sid Shrauger
Seated George Youngberg and Cici O'Connor**

History of Shrauger Home

501 Harbor Drive South, Venice, FL



This historic home, which was built in 1926 by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers for J. A. Hey at a cost of \$11,000, exhibits many Mediterranean revival characteristics such as arches, brackets, exposed truss ceiling, stucco and clay tile. Unique features

include the cantilevered second floor attached garage.

It is a contributing property for the Venezia Park Historic District nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, as noted on the bronze plaque by the front door given by the Historical Commission in 2004.

From 1938-1975 prominent Boston judge, John Wright and his wife, Sarah, owned the house. They wintered in Venice and summered in Eagle Island, NH. Judge Wright helped to draw up the German reparation plan after WWI. Following Sarah's death, ownership was transferred to her caretaker.

The rear addition was added in 1986 by then-owners John and Bettejo Bloodsworth. Baths were retiled, central air added, and windows updated at that time. Landscaping, kitchen, guest bath, and potting shed renovations were done by the present owners. Florida-friendly plant material was used as much as possible. Mexican talavera tile accents the kitchen.

Art and furnishings reflect the Shrauger's western heritage, eclectic tastes, and interest in American crafts. Of particular note are original hardwood floors, the over-100-year-old Steinway piano which belonged to the owner's mother, original sconces on the second floor, and the large ficus tree at the rear of the property.

Tampa History Center and IKEA Store Tour



On Saturday, May 30, 2009, thirty Association members and friends received a guided tour of the newly opened Tampa Bay History Center. The tour included a look at the stacks (archives storage area) and a ride in the largest elevator in Hillsborough County. Two history movies and many interactive displays are part of the two story exhibit space. The Seminole exhibits are first rate. If you visit, there is an on-site café run by the Columbia restaurant.

Following the tour of the History Center, participants visited the newly opened IKEA store. Many found bargains they could not resist. If you go, bring a bag for your purchases – the store does not supply them. There is a cafeteria style restaurant and food court where you can purchase snacks and Scandinavian foods to take home.

Friends of the Lord-Higel House Fundraiser

On Thursday, July 23, 2009, the Dairy Queen on East Venice Avenue will give the Friends **10% of all purchases** made between 5 and 8 p.m. Help raise funds for the restoration of the Lord-Higel House by having dinner at the Dairy Queen. Invite you friends to join you. You do not have to be a member of the Friends to participate!!!

Local History Articles

This issue of the Association newsletter includes an article written by member Janis Fawn summarizing letters written to Keathley H. Riggs, a resident of Venice from 1928 until her death in 1963. The letters tell of the difficulties associated with working for the railroads in the early Twentieth Century. The letters are part of the Archives collection.

A second article is a reprint of information about Mrs. Riggs that appeared in the booklet "Profiles from Venice" compiled by Rena Billingham. These profiles of Venice residents originally appeared in the Sunday Editions of the Sarasota Herald Tribune from 1955-1956.

Members wishing to submit articles can e-mail the editor at suntracker@msn.con. Please use "TIA Newsletter" in subject line. Articles can also be mailed to: Triangle Inn Association, 351 South Nassau Street, Venice, FL 34285, attention: Newsletter Editor.

LIFE, LOVE AND TRAGEDY IN THE LATE 1800s

Written by Janis Fawn 2001

Few people realize how difficult and dangerous it was working on the railroad in the late 1800s. In fact, the reason the **Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers** (BLE) organized in 1868 was for mutual aid. Railroad men were highly paid but their average life risk was said to be 11 years and seven days. The BLE was a fraternal order and became one of the most highly respected labor organizations in the world.

Recently, the Venice Archives and Area Historical Collection received a donation of several dozen letters written from December 1898 to February 1904. This collection reflects the difficulty of these lives and ends with the tragic death of a young engineer in his 20's.

The letters were written to Mrs. Jefferson Davis Riggs who lived on Pensacola Road in Venice from 1928 until her death in 1963. They reveal fear, loneliness, and the tenderest of emotions.

"Miss Keety" was 22 and attending college in Granada, Mississippi when our collection starts. The writers were Mr. Paul Stein and Mr. John Herring, both army men who later became railway engineers in Mississippi and Arkansas. They are love letters that start with "My Dear Friend" and are signed very properly with only initial and last name. They reflect a frustration with only being able to visit occasionally and with others present. It seems Miss Keety's mother wanted her to concentrate on her studies!

Separation was a consistent complaint but it was overwhelmed by the fear of spreading smallpox:

"Am so very much afraid that my suspicions will prove correct and shouldn't be so I will be in the middle of a bad fix. Am not going to expose anyone that I consider my friend and certainly not the ones that I love. It will be a terrible hardship on me to have to give up seeing my darling sweetheart but would sacrifice my own life rather than have her exposed to such a loathsome disease as smallpox."

Paul Stein, October 17, 1899.

John Herring's letters talk of loneliness, difficulty in getting along with work mates and attempts to save his sanity by fishing. He was a troubled young man who went beyond the norm in his love for his Aunt Keety. It seems he was estranged from his parents and looked to Keety as mother, sister and even potential wife:

"Miss Keety, I love you more dearly than life itself and have for months and months but laboured under the impression that you were betrothed to another."

John Herring, December 7, 1898

Her rejection of his advances comes through in his responses:

"I hope you will not be so mad at your nephew for persisting in writing a regular weekly letter."

John Herring, April 2, 1899

By 1900, Miss Keety had become Mrs. Paul Stein and our collection only contains four letters from Paul Stein and John Herring. Then tragedy struck. In February, 1904, John Herring was run over by the train that he was working on between Little Rock and St. Louis. He died a few hours later. The obituary contained in our files states that "John Herring was a steady, hard-working young man, recently entered on the responsibilities of life, which he assumed not lightly be in a manly manner."

Mrs. Keathley Stein moved with her husband to New Orleans and later Vicksburg where he died. She later met and married Jefferson Davis Riggs, 20 years her senior. He was a locomotive engineer on the famous New Orleans to Vicksburg run for more than 12 years.

They honeymooned in Venice in 1925 and decided to make it their home in 1928.

MRS. JEFFERSON DAVIS RIGGS

“PROFILES FROM VENICE”, 1957 by Rena Billingham

Very few people, who visit Venice today with a view to happy vacations or quiet retirement, realize that the present city has risen Phoenix-like from the ashes of one of the greatest investment corporations of the age.

But there are a few elderly people still living here who remember, only too well, the sad days of the depression of the 20s, when the colossal scheme of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers failed along with most of the highest financial activities in the United States.

In a quiet little home on Pensacola Road, lives a woman who has just passed her 80th birthday. She is **Mrs. Jefferson Davis Riggs**, and came here in 1925 on her honeymoon with her railroad husband, who passed on some 10 years ago at the age of 85.

Mrs. Riggs says that on the trip “nothing but the best was good enough” and they stayed at the palatial Venice Hotel, now the Kentucky Military Institute.¹ Venice was a gay, well lighted, streets were rapidly being laid out and paved and everyone was happy.

After 10 weeks the Riggs went back to Vicksburg, Miss., where her husband was stationed and had one more year before his retirement. They did not get back to Venice, where they had decided to make their home, until 1928.

Newcomers to Venice hear about the “BLE” but many fail to understand what these initials mean. In 1863 a group of locomotive engineers decided to organize for mutual aid in their relations with the railroad companies. These men, who were among the highest paid workers in the world, also were the worst insurance risks. In fact, their average life risk was said to be 11 years and seven days.

Their organization, which included 95 per cent of the locomotive engineers of the United States and Canada, was a fraternal order and at the same time the most influential and highly-respected labor organization in the world.

¹ Now known as Summerville retirement facility, 200 N. Nassau Street.

In addition to the ownership of banks, securities and shares in many industrial activities, the Brotherhood decided to establish a unique self-contained community on the West Coast of Florida where the ordinary man would be able to enjoy all the benefits that had, formerly, been reserved for the rich.

And so the BLE bought 80 square miles of land and undertook to build a city which would be beautiful as well as stable and the center of an agricultural empire. They hired experts to come in and plan the city with churches, shops, schools, paved streets, sewers, theaters, hotels and apartment houses, and not, unnaturally, many members of the BLE decided on Venice-Nokomis as their retirement home.

Although the Florida depression had begun as early as 1927, it was not until the national depression of October 1929, that the Brotherhood lost their huge fortune and with it the dues and savings of the thousands of locomotive engineers who had been paying into the organization for a lifetime.

But to return to one of the few BLE widows who still lives here. In 1928, the Riggs' couple came back to Venice and after some years of litigation and trouble managed, through H. N. (Bud) Wimmers to buy the mortgage of the house in which Mrs. Riggs still lives. She laughs when she recalls that on her honeymoon they saw the same house and she said she would never live there, because she did not like the red awnings!

The depression did not hit the Riggs family as hard as it hit some less fortunate people. Mr. Riggs had his pension from the railroad and Mrs. Riggs had a little money in her own right. "We managed," she says, "but the trouble was there was little in the shops to buy. There were no more lights in the streets, no garbage collection, hardly any people and hundreds of homes that had been deserted and abandoned by people who could not meet their obligations."

Mrs. Riggs recalled a corner lot and house she could have bought for \$300, but her husband did not want to invest anything more in Venice!

Now the lot is worth many times that figure again! Mrs. Riggs, who lives alone except for her 50-year-old parrot and her white cat, Snowbaby, had a long and interesting career before she ever saw Venice. Born

Keathley Herring near Lexington, Miss., she was the daughter of a man who literally hewed his land and home out of virgin woods.

“My father was born in 1814,” she said, “and his first home was a log cabin. Then he bought another 60 acres, then more land, until, when I was a girl, we had a beautiful plantation home.”

But the reconstruction period struck the Herring plantation and gradually slaves disappeared and land, mills and cotton gins fell into disuse and disrepair. Mrs. Riggs recalls that being one of a family of 13, her father kept a private tutor for the children and she looked with great joy upon the day when she was allowed to attend Granada Women’s College in Granada, Miss.

During her college years, she met Paul Stein, a Spanish war veteran and romantically married him. They moved to New Orleans and later to Vicksburg where he died. It was then she met and married Jefferson Davis Riggs, 20 years her senior, who was a locomotive engineer in the famous New Orleans to Vicksburg run for more than 12 years.

Mrs. Riggs is a member of the First Baptist Church, which she joined during the pastorship of Rev. Hendley F. Jelks, well-known retired Baptist minister of Venice and has been a member of the Order of the Eastern Star since 1913.

“I have been very happy here,” she says “although most of my friends have passed on or gone away.” But”, she added, “When I was in the hospital recently with a broken hip, I realized from the cards I received, that my years here had not been fruitless. In fact, I did not know I had so many friends.”

Obituary of Keathley H. Riggs

Venice Gondolier Thursday, March 21, 1963

“Mrs. Keathley H. Riggs, 87, of 239 Pensacola Road, a resident of Venice since 1925, died here March 18. Burial in Cedar Hill Cemetery, Vicksburg.”

In Memory of

Mrs. Keathley H. Riggs

Date and Place of Birth

February 26, 1876
Lexington, Miss.

Departed This Life

March 18, 1963
Venice, Florida

Date and Hour of Service

Wed., March 20, 1963 at 3:30 p.m.

Held at

First Baptist Church of Venice

Officiating

Rev. Richard R. Lloyd
First Baptist Church of Venice

Music

Mrs. J. Douglas Arnall – Organist

Eastern Star Service

Venice Chapter No. 248
Wed., March 20, 1963 – 7:30 p.m.
Rawles Funeral Home Chapter

Interment

Cedar Hill Cemetery

Did You Know . . .

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) was a labor union founded in Marshall, Michigan, on May 8, 1863 as the Brotherhood of the Footboard. A year later, its name was changed to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, sometimes referred to as the Brotherhood of Engineers. In 2004, the BLE became the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainman (BLET), a division of the Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was North America's oldest rail labor union when it merged with the Teamsters in 2004.

The BLE was the first of the "Big Four" of the railroad worker brotherhoods:

- Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE, 1864), organized as Brotherhood of the Footboard in 1863
- Order of Railway Conductors (ORC, 1868).
- Brotherhood of Locomotive Fireman (BLF, 1873), later the Brotherhood of Locomotive Fireman and Enginemen (BLFE, 1904).
- Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen, (1883), later the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT).

In 1969, all except the BLE joined with the Switchmen's Union to become the United Transportation Union (UTU).

In the era after the founding of the Big Four, some sixteen other "brotherhoods" of railroad trades organized.

Membership qualifications across trades shifted, and the alliances among brotherhoods (and their chapters) are not always clear.

After 1877, the BLE was considered less militant than some other brotherhoods, as well as the Knights of Labor and the American Railway Union.

(Above information from the on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia.)