Where did Vero Beach get its name?
Pamela J. Cooper, retired librarian and historian, Vero Beach, Florida

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Application</td>
<td>29 September 1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vero Platted by Herman Zeuch</td>
<td>1913-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vero Incorporated</td>
<td>10 June 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vero Changed to Vero Beach and incorporated</td>
<td>19 May 1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian River County formed</td>
<td>30 June 1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Flower approved: Hibiscus</td>
<td>17 October 1967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The younger generation of Vero Beach often called their hometown “Zero Beach,” a place where they claimed that “there was nothing to do.” It is ironic that when you look at the first post office application of 1891, it appears that the Postmaster General changed the name to ZERO possibly thinking the applicant had misspelled the name. (See image) It was returned to the Post Office Department by Henry T. Gifford with a bolded letter V written over the Z.

There are over a dozen theories on the origination of name "Vero." Listed below are suggested or published possibilities, many quite intriguing and one, the Flagler Railroad theory, that may prove to be the “real reason” for the name.

1. Vero was named after Vera, the wife of Henry Gifford. Gifford’s wife’s name was Sarah and not Vera. Numerous articles have been published that erroneously state that Vero was named after the wife of Henry Gifford. His wife’s name was Sarah Jane Woodworth (1842-1894) and she married Henry about 1878 in Orange County, Vermont. No family members had the given name of "Vero" or "Vera" for five generations. (See Gifford Family History located in the vertical file at the Main Library.)

2. Vero was named after two Italian cities Venice or Verona, and due to postal regulations, “the name must have only four letters.” It was not till 1894 that the post office asked for applicants for new post offices to "shorten" names, and that requirement did not mandate that the names be only four letters.

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Some printed records\(^5\) state that Sarah Gifford suggested naming the area after two Italian cities: Venice and Verona. (See excerpt below on Post Office Guidelines of 1894 - NOT 1891.) Because Indian River County had several existing towns in the area at that time, such as Sebastian, Woodley, and the Narrows, all names that were not four letters, this theory most likely is not accurate. Research of the Woodworth family revealed that some of Sarah’s relatives lived in Verona, New York: This part of the theory is speculation and can only add to the mystery. The real mystery lies in the word "Vero" itself, which is a Latin word.

Post Office Policies on Place Names: \(^6\)
The first official reference to the naming of post offices by the Post Office Department occurred in 1891. On February 18 of that year, Postmaster General Miscellaneous Order #87 alerted the clerks, first those of the Division of Appointment and the Division of Bonds and later those in all branches of the Department, to use the spelling of post office names published in the bulletins of the United States Board on Geographic Names, which in 1906 was given the authority to determine and change place-names.

On April 14, 1892, Postmaster General Miscellaneous Order #48 directed the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General not to establish any post office whose proposed name differed from that of the town or village in which it was to be located. Whenever possible, the name of the post office was to be the same as that of the local railway station to avoid confusion and delay in the transfer of mail.

On April 9, 1894, another directive was given. To remove a cause of annoyance to the Department and injury to the Postal Service in the selection of names for newly established post offices, it is hereby ordered that from this date only short names or names of one word will be accepted.

3. The name Vero came from the Latin word for "Veritas" - adverb Verus or Vero meaning “truth,” “in fact,” “indeed,” and/or “to be sure.” Sarah Gifford’s son, Friend Charles Gifford, described his mother as a person who loved to study Italy and Italian literature\(^7\). She also spoke Latin\(^8,9\). She educated her children\(^6\), and, in fact, her daughter Nettie May was one of the first school teachers in Indian River County. Veritas is the plural form of the Latin word Verus. The adverb for Verus is Vero which means “in truth,” “really,” “indeed” or “in fact.” Since Sarah did know Latin, this theory of her choosing a Latin word is reasonable and perhaps the most likely. It would have been interesting to understand why she felt Vero was a place for truth.

4. Good friends of the Gifford family were from Centerville, Michigan and the wife’s name was Vera Leinbach.\(^10\) According to published records, the Giffords may have wanted to name the town after Vera. According to hearsay, the name became Vero because of a typographical error and postal regulation. No proof of this statement is available, and research shows that despite the published records, there does not seem to be a connection between the families.

5. Hurricanes "veered" away from our area, so they called it Vero. This was mentioned by several people but does not seem plausible.

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\(^10\) Thompson, William (Pete) C. Pioneer Chit Chat, August 31, 1961 p28, Vero Beach Press Journal
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6. The Spanish word\(^{11}\) Vero means a fur-bearing animal like a Martin or Otter. At one time there were numerous otters on the Indian River.

7. Portuguese word "Vero" means warm summer climate. A nice possibility to think about.

8. Italian word\(^{12}\) "Vero" means "It's incredible but true!" Another very nice possibility.

9. Vero was named after Florida's first Catholic Archbishop Augustin Verot (pronounced Vero) 1804-1876. Vero was the first Catholic Bishop of St. Augustine from 1870 until his death in 1876. Vero was a part of the Diocese of St. Augustine until 1958.\(^{13}\) There were no Catholic churches in the area before 1900.

10. An email\(^{14}\) was received from a family with the surname Vero in Warwickshire, England. In this email the Vero family who conjecture that Vero might have been named after their family. Research has not proven this to be the case, and no Vero family has been located in Florida.

11. A man by the name of Herbert S. Britt was paid $13.00 a month to bring mail by rowboat and he named the post office. Britt rowed from the Narrows Post Office (Johns Island) to the Henry T. Gifford home in Vero once a week. According to hearsay, the name Vero was accredited to him. However, the reason is not known, and further research is needed to prove or disprove this particular theory.

12. Flagler Railroad Theory.\(^{15}\) Often controversial and extremely wealthy, Henry Flagler is known for laying the tracks of the Florida East Coast Railroad. In the early newspapers of the 1890's, there were reports and often letters to the editor about the status of the FEC. When the time was getting close for the tracks to be laid down in Indian River County, many people were upset that Flagler was considering putting the tracks on the west side of the river, the mainland. In letters to the editor signed by "Veritas" and "Progress," locals on Orchid Island, the east side of the river asked: "Why all of the fruits and vegetables were being grown on the East side on the islands. How were they going to travel across the river in time to catch the train? After all, no one on the mainland was really selling very much.\(^{15w}\)

The use of the Latin word Veritas in these letters to the editor could serve to reinforce theory #3 because the laying down of the Flagler Railroad tracks was happening at the time of the naming of Vero.

13. Vero is "the real thing!" Sarah Gifford suggested the word "Veritas" meaning "truth" according to the 1971-1972 "Florida Handbook." It states the word "Veritas" became Vero, the adverb form of Veritas. It further states it also means "the real thing." I am not sure where the author heard that phrase, but I like it!

14. The new town was first called Venice. Nettie May and her father Henry Gifford arrived on the east coast of Florida in 1887. After a year, Henry returned home to Vermont to bring his wife Sarah and two other children to the new land. According to a 1939 interview in Orlando with Nettie May, she said her mother first called the new town Venice because they arrived during the rainy season and there was water everywhere. It would be about twenty years (1912-1913) later before they dug the canals that helped keep the water at bay. Sarah later learned there already was a town called Venice on the west coast of Florida, and she subsequently changed the name to Vero.

In 1925, “Beach” was added to the name.


\(^{13}\) Fax dated May 26, 1998 from Vero Zimmerman to Pam (Hall) Cooper regarding Father Verot.

\(^{14}\) Email dated May 2, 1998 from Diana Palmer of England to Pam (Hall) Cooper.

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It is important to note that the local history books were written decades after the naming of the town, therefore much of the information comes from hearsay. The Post Office's alleged requirement of four-letter place names was never investigated, and debunked, until now. Sarah's education of her children testifies to her knowledge, and her use of Latin is the simplest of the explanations. The other theories are all speculations presented by different individuals and historians. It is hoped that future generations will find the "truth."

Note:
According to F. Charles Gifford, when the train stopped in Indian River County, Vero was first called "Tie-pile near Milepost 228" (Historical Chronicle, 1975). This is an incorrect statement. Flagler directed that a section camp at Gifford be designated as the station in 1894. Vero was designated as a post office in 1891. (Flagler, 1894).