

The Spanish River Papers

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"I realize how much this country has grown, when I remember that in the year I was born, there were exactly 24 miles of railroad in all the United States."

Henry M. Flagler 1830-1913
STORY OF A PIONEER

A report to the membership of

Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

P. O. Box 1113, Boca Raton, Florida 33432

from Mrs. Dorn Lee Redd, Mrs. Russell W. Fisher

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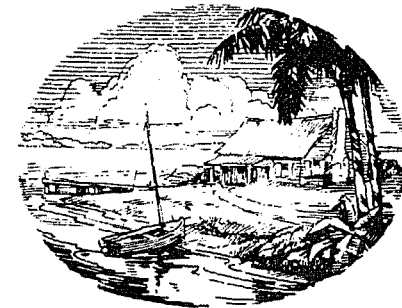
of the

Florida East Coast Railway

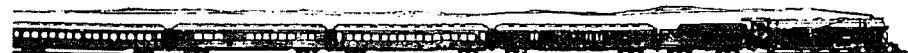
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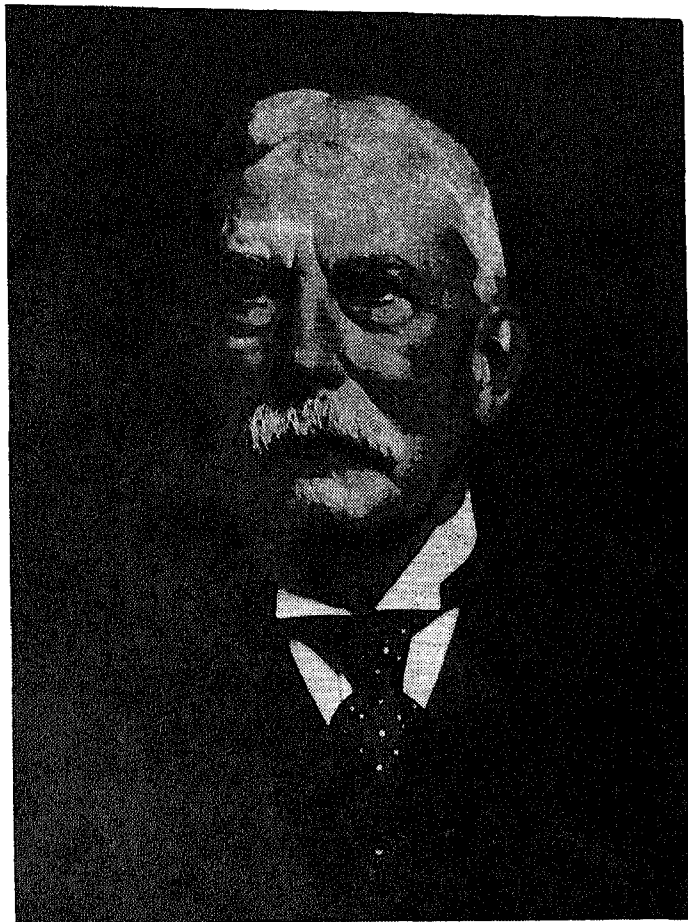
FLAGLER SYSTEM

1885-86 1935-36



Dedicated to the early pioneers of the Florida East Coast. Many were their hardships and privations. Great was their courage, vision and faith in the future.





HENRY MORRISON FLAGLER

January 2, 1830—May 20, 1913

*Builder of the Florida East Coast Railway,
Flagler System Hotels and associated enter-
prises. Pioneer of the East Coast of Florida.*



AILROADS are often called "Empire Builders". Sections of our country owe their initial development to the first railroads that penetrated them supplying that lifeblood of transportation and ease of access essential to progress. The builders of these first railroads gambled heavily on the future. It required both vision and courage to back that vision with capital. The pioneer settler and pioneer railroad cast their lot together and endeavored, through their joint efforts, to develop the country. As time

passed, and success crowned their efforts, competitors came in to share the fruits of the development which the pioneers and their followers had created.

In the annals of "Empire Building" possibly no railroad brought as marked and rapid development to any territory as did the Florida East Coast Railway to the East Coast of Florida . . . On the lower East Coast of Florida only a small settlement existed at Palm Beach, and a few families lived at Miami when the Florida East Coast Railway reached them. Vast are the changes which the building of the Railway has wrought.

CONDITIONS BEFORE THE RAILWAY CAME



In the early 80's when our story begins, the East Coast of Florida was very sparsely inhabited south of St. Augustine. Jacksonville had around 15,000 inhabitants, but there was no bridge across the St. Johns River connecting it with points south. St. Augustine, settled in 1565, remained a rather dilapidated, sleepy little town of 2,500 with no particular ambitions for the future. Daytona, also isolated, possibly had a population of 200.

. . . Travel in those days is said to have been very arduous. To reach even such a city as Jacksonville, from the North and West, involved many changes and delays due to the

different gauges of the railroads. From 75 to 90 hours were required to make the trip by rail from New York. Today this same distance is covered in less than 21 hours over a continuous double track route.

Until 1883 no railway existed between Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Adventurous travelers, who wanted to visit the Ancient City, took a boat down the St. Johns River to Tocol and there transferred to a little mule powered railroad that carried them to the outskirts of their destination.

Farther south travel was chiefly by sailboat on the bays and rivers, subject to the uncertainties of wind and weather. The Halifax River, Indian River, Lake Worth and Bay Biscayne provided the main thoroughfares. There were practically no roads in this section except the sand road between St. Augustine and Daytona which meant a two day journey.

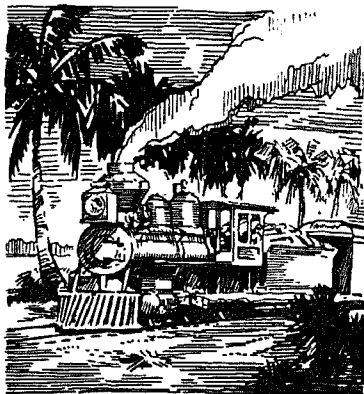
. . . The life of these early pioneers was simple, devoid of luxuries and conveniences. They raised some fruit and vegetables for home consumption, but their market for these perishable products was very limited due to lack of transportation facilities other than occasional slow and irregular sailboats and steamers.



Livestock did not figure much in their assets. Cows were almost unknown, and as late as 1894, a pioneer states one could not buy a pint of milk at any price. Fresh meat in the summertime was a rarity and the only way to get fresh fish was to catch them.

THE FIRST RAILROADS

To a line known as the St. Johns Railway belongs the distinction of being the first railroad built in present Florida East Coast Railway territory. Chartered in 1858 and completed shortly before the Civil War, this railroad ran from the outskirts of St. Augustine to Toco, on the St. Johns River, where it connected with river steamers. It was a crude affair, consisting of strap iron laid on wooden rails. Mules furnished the motive power and, according to early patrons, had a habit of lying down so that the trip of 15 miles required from 4 to 5 hours to negotiate.



In 1870 William Astor of New York purchased the St. Johns Railway, improved the roadbed and later added a coffee mill engine on wheels to supplant mule power.

In 1883, the isolation of St. Augustine was further broken by the completion of another line into it, the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River Railway, running from South Jacksonville to the Ancient City, a distance of 36 miles.

The roadbed and equipment of this railroad were also somewhat crude. The rails weighed 30 pounds to the yard, as compared with the 90 pound rail in use today. They were laid narrow gauge, 3 feet apart, instead of 4 feet 8½ inches, later adopted by the railroads as standard gauge. The locomotives were wood burners and had large bell shaped stacks, with a screen over the top known as the "spark arrester". All equipment had link and pin couplers and hand brakes. The fare charged for the 36 - mile ride between Jacksonville and St. Augustine was \$1.50 one way, \$2.50 round-trip.

THE EMPIRE BUILDER ARRIVES

Such were the transportation conditions previous to and at the time a man named Henry M. Flagler made his first visit to Florida, coming to St. Augustine in the winter of 1883-84. He was 53 years old and had made millions as one of the founders of the Standard Oil Company.

... At Republic, Ohio, he obtained work in a country store for \$5.00 a month and board. To quote his own words he worked hard and saved money. After accumulating a little capital, he moved to Bellevue, Ohio, where he entered the grain commission business. His business in Bellevue prospered ...

... While at Bellevue, Flagler had shipped many a carload of grain to another young man in Cleveland, named John D. Rockefeller. John D. and William Rockefeller, and Samuel Andrews, subsequently started an oil refinery in Cleveland. When they built a second refinery in 1867 Stephen Harkness backed him in a partnership with Rockefeller and his associates. The business developed

rapidly and in 1870 the partnership was closed and the Standard Oil Company organized. This proved the foundation of the Flagler fortune.

BUILDING OF THE PONCE DE LEON

Such was the background of the man whom fate had destined to bring to St. Augustine in the winter 1883-84. He was immensely wealthy and old enough to retire. Little did he dream as he entered the Ancient City that the work, for which he is today best remembered, lay before him. His role as an "Empire Builder" was just beginning.

... Before leaving St. Augustine that winter Flagler's thoughts had crystallized into plans for the erection of a magnificent hotel, to be suitably christened the "Ponce de Leon", in honor of the discoverer of Florida. For this purpose he commissioned a comparatively unknown firm of young New York architects, Carrere and Hastings, to prepare plans. They immediately left for Spain to gather ideas.

Work on the building of the Ponce de Leon began in 1885. Before it was completed, the Alcazar began to go up on the other side of the street. St. Augustine bustled with activity and was experiencing the greatest era of improvement in its history.

THE BEGINNING OF RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT

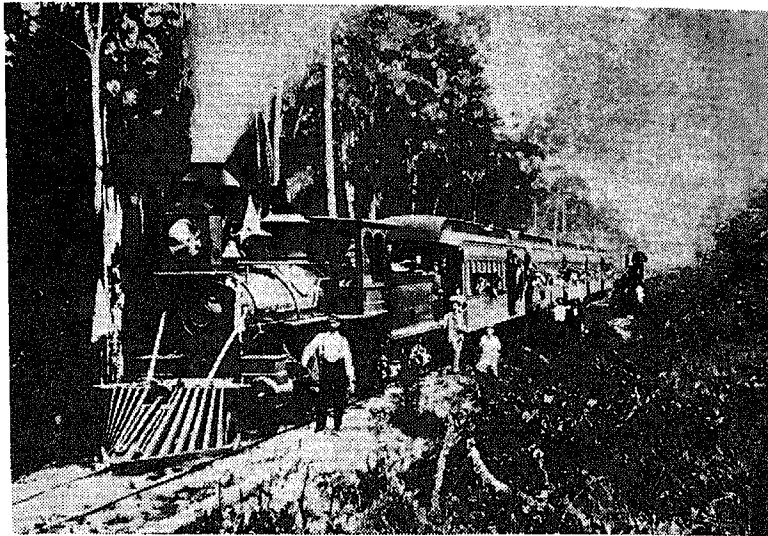
With a small fortune invested in these St. Augustine enterprises, Flagler found the narrow gauge rail line into St. Augustine inadequate for the transportation of the immense quantities of building materials for his new hotels and the class of guests he hoped to attract by them. Negotiations with the owners of the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River Railway failed to convince them that they should modernize and improve its facilities. Accordingly on December 31, 1885, Henry M. Flagler purchased the stocks and bonds of this Company. This event, of fifty years ago, launched his career as an "Empire Builder" and marked the beginning of what is now the Florida East Coast Railway.

TWO IMPORTANT EVENTS OF 1888

In 1888 two events of great importance in the resort and railway history of the Florida East Coast took place. In January of that year, the magnificent Ponce de Leon Hotel at St. Augustine officially opened its doors, and the first through all-Pullman vestibule train was operated between New York and Florida.

Up until 1888 the gauge of the southern railroads, meaning the distance between the rails, was not uniform. This occasioned many delays and transfers because the cars of one railroad could not, in most instances, be operated through over the rails of another. In 1886, however, the Southern railroads began the work of relaying their tracks to standard gauge, that is, with the rails 4 feet and 8½ inches apart. This work was completed in 1888. On January 10, 1888, the first through all-Pullman vestibule train was operated from Jersey City to Jacksonville. It made the run in 29 hours and 50 minutes. People stared wide-eyed at this transportation marvel. The cars had closed vestibules and one could walk

from one end of the train to the other without being exposed to the wind and weather. Previous to this, all cars had open vestibules. And wonder of wonders, the new train was electrically lighted.



A train on the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River Railway in the 80's.

This train, later called the "Florida Special", has been in regular operation each winter since that date. It now makes the run from New York to Jacksonville in 20 hours and from New York to Miami over the double track Florida East Coast Railway in 27 hours and some odd minutes.

The opening of the Ponce de Leon and the inauguration of through train service gave a great impetus to Florida tourist travel, which has since become such an important industry and factor in the East Coast of Florida's development. Among the first passengers on the Florida Special and guest at the Ponce de Leon Hotel that first season was Grover Cleveland.

BRIDGING THE ST. JOHNS RIVER

At this time passengers for St. Augustine and points south of Jacksonville were transferred by ferry across the St. Johns River to South Jacksonville where they boarded the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River Railway. To eliminate this inconvenience Flagler decided to bridge the St. Johns. A steel bridge was commenced in 1889, completed and opened for service January 20, 1890. It was one of the first steel bridges in the south and remained in constant use until 1925, when the present double track span was built.

OTHER RAILROADS ACQUIRED

During 1885 and 1886, a narrow gauge line, known as the St. Augustine & Palatka Railway, was built from Toco Junction to East Palatka. Mr. Utley J. White had a little logging road in the vicinity of East Palatka, which in 1887, he

extended to Ormond and Daytona. It was called the St. Johns & Halifax River Railway. During 1888 and 1889 Flagler acquired these properties, improved and widened them to standard gauge.

At Ormond, two men named Anderson and Price, had a small hotel. This Flagler purchased in 1890, naming it Hotel Ormond, retaining its managers, enlarging the building and beautifying the grounds. Thus improved resort and railway facilities were established as far south as Daytona.

THE EMPIRE REACHES FARTHER SOUTH



... Farther south along the Indian River was a sparsely settled shore into which a few winter visitors were beginning to venture. Some of them went down over what was then known as the "Tropical Trunk Line", a combination of small railroads along the St. Johns River to Titusville, thence Indian River steamers. This section also showed promise as an agricultural region. Oranges and pineapples were already being shipped in some quantity from it by boat.

Possibly realizing that an extension of his railroad along the shores of the Indian River would control this growing traffic, Flagler, in 1892, decided to extend his railroad farther south by construction. Up to this time he had merely acquired properties, which he improved and strengthened. Now he was to begin railroad building into almost virgin territory.

In October of 1892 the name of the Company was changed to the Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railway and the line was pushed Southward with great rapidity. Train service was established to New Smyrna by November 2nd, 1892. By February 27th, 1893, it was in operation to Cocoa and Rockledge. Eau Gallie was reached June 26th, of the same year and by January 29th, 1894, trains were operating to Fort Pierce.

A GREAT RESORT UNFOLDS

In the meantime Flagler had visited Palm Beach and was so impressed with its beauty and climate that he immediately planned the construction of an immense hotel there and the extension of his railway to that point. Palm Beach was then the site of a small settlement and two small hotels.

... "Before returning, the famous McCormick homestead was purchased by Mr. Flagler. It was then given out that one of the largest hotels in the country would be erected and ready for opening the following winter. There were still large numbers of tourists remaining on the Lake, and the news of Mr. Flagler's purchase having been published far and wide, prices of real estate reached seemingly incredible figures. Prices ran anywhere from \$150.00 to \$1,000.00 an acre. People who had come here and homesteaded a few years ago suddenly found themselves rich."

Preparations were made to begin work on the hotel at once. Men and materials began to pour in. Shacks, tents and boarding houses were put up and rented. Soon there were one thousand men at work creating the new resort. Ground for the hotel was broken May 1, 1893. The immense Royal Poincianna was completed within the short space of nine months and opened for guests the following February. Flagler was a man of action.

As the railroad was not completed to West Palm Beach until March 22nd, 1894, all material for the Royal Poinciana was transported down the river from Eau Gallie to Jupiter, thence across the little Jupiter and Lake Worth Railroad, 8 miles to Juno, where it was again transferred to boat on Lake Worth.

Palm Beach evidently showed bright prospects from the beginning. During the summer of 1895, Flagler began the construction of another large hotel, the Palm Beach Inn, later called the Breakers, located a quarter of a mile east of the Royal Poinciana on the ocean shore. He also bridged Lake Worth and extended a spur of his railway over to these hotels. A large pier was built reaching 1,000 feet into the ocean and a steamship line established between Palm Beach and Nassau, Bahamas. He also chose Palm Beach as the site for his luxurious winter home, Whitehall, which he built during 1901 and 1902.

NAME FLORIDA EAST COAST RAILWAY ADOPTED

... On September 7th, 1895, at a meeting of the stockholders, a resolution was adopted to change the name of the railway corporation to the Florida East Coast Railway, the name under which it has since been operated, so distinctively indicative of the territory served ...

HOW THE RAILROAD CAME TO MIAMI

About 1893, Mr. James E. Ingraham, formerly associated with Henry B. Plant on the West Coast of Florida, became associated with Flagler. He later became Vice-President of the Company in charge of its agricultural and land departments. In an address made by Mr. Ingraham before the Woman's Club of Miami on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial tablet, the events leading up to the founding of Miami are aptly described.

"Sometime before Mr. Flagler finished his railroad to Palm Beach", relates Mr. Ingraham, "I met at a dinner party in Cleveland, Ohio, Mrs. Julia Tuttle, who told me she was about to remove her family and effects to Miami. During the evening she said 'Some day somebody will build a railway to Miami. I hope you will be interested in it, and when they do, I will be willing to divide my property there and give one-half to them for a town site.'

"In the winter of 1894-95 occurred the first of the great freezes, ruining the orange groves in the orange belt, touching the pineapples on the Indian River, and nipping the coconut palm leaves as far south as Palm Beach. As the orange industry was the principal one in Florida at that time it seemed like a fatal blow."

"Immediately after the freeze I came to Miami and found at Fort Lauderdale and territory south, orange trees, lemon trees and lime trees blooming, or about to bloom, without a leaf hurt, and vegetables growing in a small way untouched. There had been no frost there. I gathered a lot of blooms from the various trees, put them in damp cotton and after an interview with Mrs. Tuttle and Mr. and

Mrs. Brickell at Miami, I hurried to St. Augustine. Here I called on Mr. Flagler and showed him the blossoms, telling him that I believed that these were from the only part of Florida, except possibly a small area on the West coast, which had escaped the freeze."

"I said, 'I have here written proposals from Mrs. Tuttle and Mr. and Mrs. Brickell, inviting you to extend your railroad from Palm Beach to Miami and offering to share with you their holdings for a town site.'

"Mr. Flagler looked at me for some minutes in silence. Then he said, 'How soon can you arrange for me to go to Miami?' " ...

THE FOUNDING OF MIAMI

In February of 1895, the "Empire Builder" drove into Miami with his party according to schedule ... Before bedtime Mr. Flagler had accepted the proposition for the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway to Miami, had selected the site of the Royal Palm Hotel and told Mr. McGuire and Mr. McDonald to build it, and had authorized Mr. Parrott to construct the railway extension. He told me to go ahead and make plans for the town site of Miami, clear the land and get it ready. He selected, too, the site for a passenger station, freight yards and freight station and told Mr. Parrott to put advertisements in the state papers that labor of all kinds could find employment at Miami for many months in the construction of railroad, hotels and other classes of work.

A GREAT CITY ESTABLISHED

The Florida East Coast Railway was completed to Miami on April 15th, 1896, and the road opened to this point for commercial service on April 22nd. Continuous operation over the Florida East Coast Railway between Jacksonville and Miami, a distance of 366 miles, was thus established ...

MIAMI'S RAPID GROWTH

Flagler did more than lay out a town site for Miami. He made the new city attractive and livable by financing a modern electric light plant, sewage system and waterworks, put up cottages and other buildings; he also paved many streets at his own expense. With this start the young city grew with remarkable rapidity.

THE WILDERNESS BEGINS TO BLOOM

Miami remained the southern terminus of the Florida East Coast Railway until 1903. The "Empire Builder" had pushed his railroad down through the tangled wilderness of the lower East Coast of Florida with remarkable rapidity, creating towns and cities on the way.

... He had already reached an age when the majority of wealthy men retire, but the most daring achievement of his long career still lay before him. In 1903 the Florida East Coast Railway was extended to Homestead, reaching that point December 15, 1904. But the "Empire Builder", now 74, had visions still farther south.

BRIDGING THE OCEAN TO KEY WEST

At Miami, Flagler spent over \$200,000 of his own money deepening the harbor channel for the operation of his steamer lines to Havana and the Bahamas. He had gradually evolved the idea of establishing a route for travel and commerce between the United States and Cuba, the West Indies, Central and South America. Failing to reach deep water, or to obtain government cooperation in further improvement of the harbor at Miami, he looked farther south for a deep water terminus. Key West, due to the part it had played in the Spanish-American war, seemed at that time strategically located from the standpoint of Pan American trade. The actual beginning of work on the Panama Canal perhaps hastened his decision to extend his line to that point.

The daring work of bridging the Florida Keys to Key West was accomplished in the face of immense obstacles. There were no precedents to follow. Its builders found ready for them only the air to breathe. Men, materials, food supplies, equipment, even water to drink, had to be transported from remote sources. Often nature arose in anger at being shackled, destroying miles of embankments and lashing against the huge bridges of concrete and steel. These storms necessitated many changes in the original plan of construction.

January 2nd, 1912, marked Flagler's 82nd birthday, but the last rail could not be laid by that date. On January 22nd of that year the white-haired "Empire Builder" triumphantly rode the first train across the Extension into Key West where a three-day celebration was held in his honor.

In May of 1913 his life's work quietly ended at his home in his beloved Palm Beach . . . All business along the East Coast of Florida ceased the afternoon of his funeral, and all flags were flown at half-mast. Every wheel on the Florida East Coast Railway, on trains and in shops, remained motionless for a period of ten minutes.

PIONEERED IN TRAVEL CLEANLINESS

The first locomotives used on the Florida East Coast Railway were wood-burners. During the year 1900, work began on adapting locomotives to burn coal and this fuel soon came into general use. Unlike most lines, the Florida East Coast Railway tapped no coal producing regions, a condition which made this fuel expensive. Another objection was that the soot and cinders, produced by coal-burning locomotives, proved a source of annoyance to passengers and those living along the right of way.

Therefore, in 1915, a decision was made to further improve service by changing from coal to oil, and at great expense all locomotives were equipped as oil burners, making the Florida East Coast Railway the sootless and cinderless route. Both travelers and residents welcomed this innovation.



. . . At first the tracks of the Florida East Coast Railway were laid directly on the sandy soil. As speeds increased, trains in dry weather stirred up clouds of dust, which found its way into the cars. To remedy this, rock-ballasting of the main line began in the early 1900's. Crushed rock was placed on the sandy road-bed and packed about the ties, making it smooth, firm and keeping down dust. Since then a heavily rock-ballasted roadbed has been maintained, adding to both the cleanliness and smoothness of train operation.

Thus the Florida East Coast Railway pioneered in providing clean, comfortable travel, free from dust and cinders, long before air-conditioning arrived to eliminate these annoyances.

FIRST TO ADVERTISE THE FLORIDA EAST COAST

. . . The northern public first learned of the East Coast of Florida through the railway and its associated hotels. For many years these were the sole agencies advertising its advantages from a resort and residential standpoint. Many thousands of booklets were issued by them annually and other forms of advertising employed, long before the communities thus benefited were in a position to publicize themselves.

AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FOSTERED

. . . With the advent of the railway, which furnished fast regular transportation to marketing centers, fruit and vegetable growing became highly profitable. As a result, agricultural production rapidly expanded. The railway through its land and agricultural departments aided growers in every way possible and helped many newcomers to establish themselves.

The Florida East Coast Railway early adapted the character of its service to the highly perishable class of products which it was called upon to transport, operating fast, regular freight trains at express speed. Before the development of packing houses, side tracks and platforms were established at frequent intervals from which "pick-up" trains gathered the growers' produce, concentrating it into carloads and trainloads. The railway even issued weather warnings. Prior to the advent of radio, and its wide use in rural communities, Florida East Coast Railway locomotive engineers were required to sound six long blasts of the whistle at frequent intervals to warn growers that an approaching cold wave was predicted . . .

A MODERN DOUBLE TRACK SYSTEM

. . . The Florida East Coast Railway's double track main line between Jacksonville and Miami, the only double track route through Florida, gives it the advantage of much faster schedules than would be possible under single track operation. Over every mile of this double track line, modern automatic electric light block signals further speed and protect train movement.

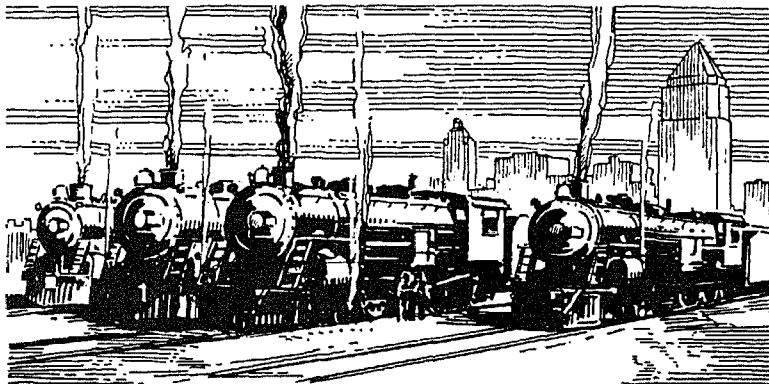
At Miami the Florida East Coast Railway makes direct connection with Peninsular & Occidental Steamships to and from Havana, Cuba. Its trains also connect at Miami with planes of the great Pan American Airways system, flying on regular schedules to Nassau, Bahamas, Cuba, West Indies, Mexico, Central and South American countries.

In 1915, soon after the completion of the Over-Sea Extension to Key West, freight car ferry service was inaugurated between that point and Havana, Cuba. On September 2nd, 1935, a storm of unprecedented intensity practically destroyed over 40 miles of the line on the Florida Keys, necessitating the suspension of train service south of Florida City for an indefinite period. Due to this condition, Florida East Coast Car Ferries are now being operated between Port Everglades, on the main line of the Florida East Coast Railway, and Havana. Known as the "Cuban all-Rail Route", this service provides a fast continuous rail link between the United States and those on Cuban soil.

A FLORIDA INSTITUTION

The Florida East Coast Railway is also unusual in that it operates entirely within the bounds of one state, the State of Florida. It is therefore distinctly a local institution.

... In the language of the Florida Railroad Commission of 1888, "The interests of the railroads and the people, of the carriers and the shippers, are the same. The bonds that unite them are indissoluble, only death can divorce them. A prosperous people make prosperous railroads. They each lay golden eggs for the other, and neither should be killed. They must live by helping each other . . . must live and let live. The pioneer railroad and the pioneer settler cast their lot together and expected to grow up with the country."



The preceding report is contained in total in the booklet THE STORY OF A PIONEER, 1885-86 -- 1935-36. Published in the 30's by the Flagler System, the booklet was donated by Mr. Carl Lang to the Boca Raton Historical Society. The SPANISH RIVER PAPERS is based entirely upon period material donated by members of the community and existing material from the Palm Beach Historical Society Archives. Donations of any and all forms of historical reference material pertaining to this area are greatly needed and would be appreciated by the Boca Raton Historical Society.

PIONEER OF THE EAST COAST

