



# Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

## Southeast Chapter

### Newsletter No. 124 – April 2011

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#### THE GREATEST (RAILROAD) STORY EVER TOLD

##### Henry Flagler and the Florida East Coast Railway's Key West Extension

By Seth Bramson

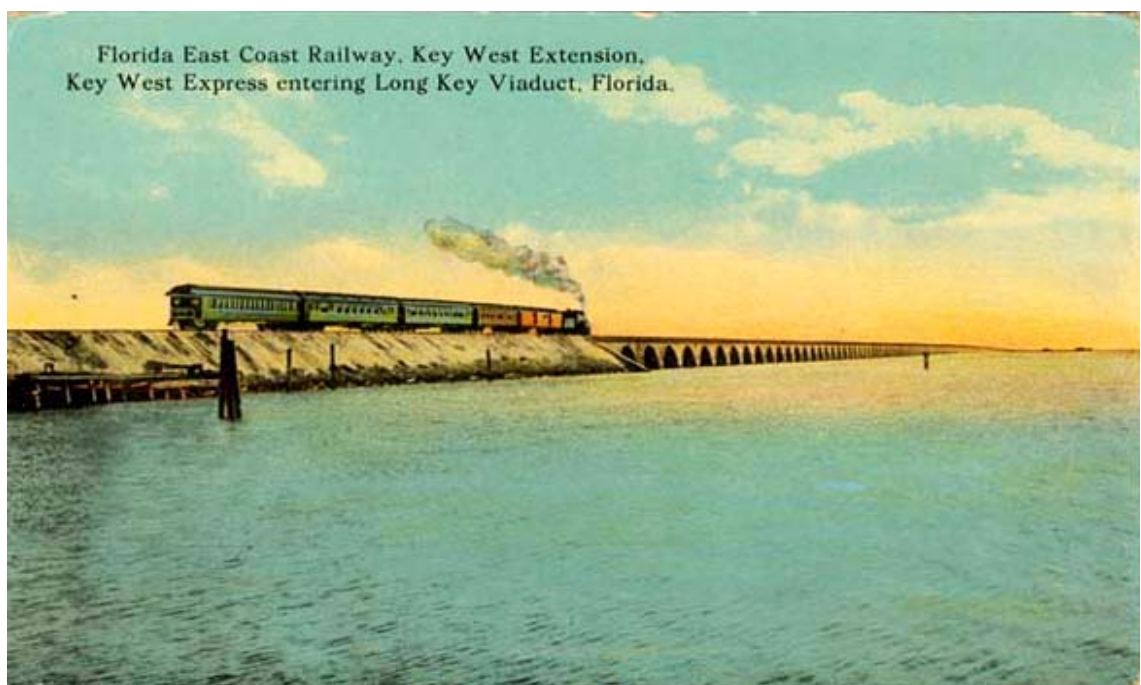
To all my R & L H S SEC friends:

It is with the greatest of pleasure that, having signed the contract with The History Press to write the history of the Key West Extension of the Florida East Coast Railway on behalf of the Key West Art & Historical Museum (the current, magnificent exhibit on the history of that great event opened on January 22 and will continue with a major function celebrating the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first train on January 22, 2012) which will host the launch of the book concurrent with the great 1/22/12 event, I share with you the introduction to that very much anticipated tome.

As always, if any of you have any material from the Extension that you would like me to include in the book, please do not hesitate to contact me at [mrfec@yahoo.com](mailto:mrfec@yahoo.com) or by telephone at (305) 757-1016, or on the cell at (305) 4-MR FEC-1 (305-467-3321). Meantime, please enjoy the introduction to THE GREATEST (RAILROAD) STORY EVER TOLD:  
Henry Flagler and the Key West Extension of the Florida East Coast Railway.

Cordially, Seth H. Bramson, Company Historian - Florida East Coast Railway

Editors note: I had previously retrieved post card images from the state archive, and with Seth's kind permission, have included a few of them with his article, for illustration of the Extension.



All postcard photo's in this issue are from the Florida Photographic Collection

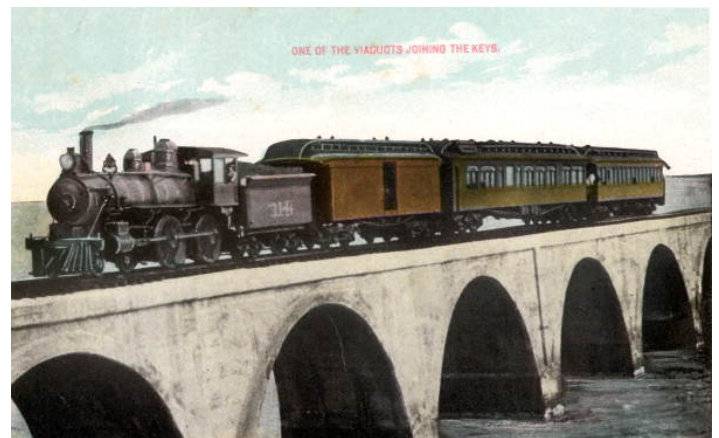
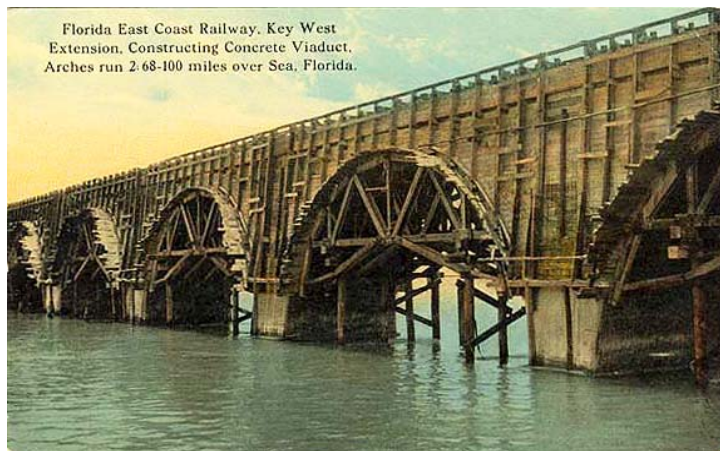
*Southeast Limited*

## Introduction: Henry Flagler and the Florida East Coast Railway's Key West Extension

This book is a story of superlatives. Henry Morrison Flagler—Florida's Empire Builder—was, is and always will be the single greatest name in the history of Florida, while the Key West Extension of the Flagler-owned Florida East Coast Railway was, is and will always remain—absolutely, positively, unequivocally, inarguably and incontestably—the greatest railroad engineering and construction feat in U. S. (and, possibly, world) history. The building of that railroad was not just a matter or issue of “how,” but, more importantly, “when.” Almost everything the builders of the railroad did was a first, in engineering, in construction and in the art and discipline of American railroad building.

There are those individuals (probably the same people who still believe the fable known in South Florida as “the orange blossom myth” which falsely had Mr. Flagler extending his railroad to the shores of Biscayne Bay because Julia Tuttle, one of Miami's early pioneers, supposedly sent him some orange blossoms following the great Florida freezes of December of 1894 and January and February of 1895, an “event” that can be equated to a fairy tale, and which never occurred) who have had, through the years, the temerity to refer to the Key West Extension as “Flagler's Folly,” a charge and comment that was and is pure, unadulterated nonsense.

Although the first article propounding a railroad to Key West appeared in print in 1836 (Mr. Flagler then only six years old) and although famed Confederate General John B. Gordon (one of the numerous former highly ranked Confederate officers who, once the Civil War had ended, strongly supported full restoration of the Union) incorporated and chartered the Great Southern Railroad in Florida in the 1880s with the right to build numerous lines within the state, including one to Key West, and even with the National Geographic Magazine article written by Key West's famed collector of customs Jefferson B. Browne in 1896, Key West, at the time that article was written Florida's largest city, was not Flagler's initial destination of choice.



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### Announcements:

Our regular meetings are the 2nd Thursday of the month @ 6:30 PM, in the CSX Bldg., 500 Water St. Jacksonville, FL. {We are now meeting in the Acosta – C room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor at the CSX General Office Building.}  
June 2-5, 2011 - R&LHS Annual Convention, Elkins, WV (Cass, Durbin Rocket)

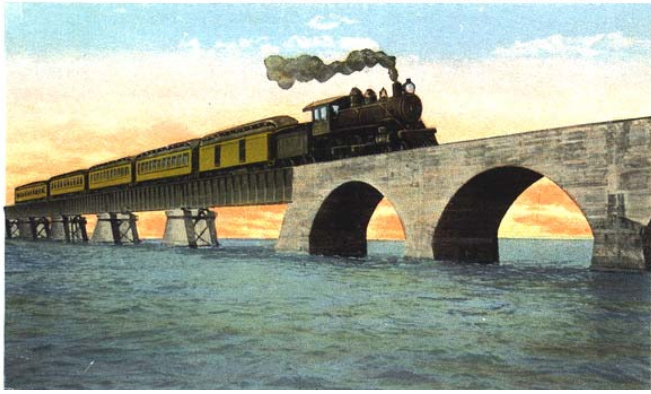
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### SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS

<b>John A. Leynes</b>	<b>Chairman</b>	<b>904-287-1044</b>
<b>Paul Newton</b>	<b>Vice-Chairman</b>	<b>904-296-7340</b>
<b>Bill Howes</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	
<b>Robert Van Nest</b>	<b>Treasurer</b>	

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32260-0544**

The *Southeast Limited* Newsletter is edited and published by John Leynes and Jim Smith.



Florida East Coast Railway, Key West Extension,  
Finishing Concrete Piers for Steel Bridge over Sea,  
Knights Key, Florida.

It would, of course, eventually be Key West and the railroad's extension to the island city that would cement Flagler's fame and legend for all time, but this book is not simply a story of an incredible construction feat, but, rather, of the life and times of the operation of a great railroad, how it was managed, who rode it, what it did for the Florida Keys and what it meant to the conchs, the residents of the Keys and Key West.

In addition to the railroad, though, Flagler understood that there had to be ancillary services to make people recognize the usefulness, viability and need to patronize that railroad, hence there were the hotels, the Key West Terminal and the FEC Car Ferry Company, with its daily round-trips to Cuba, carrying vital railroad car loads of freight to and from Key West. In addition, the Flagler System owned Peninsular & Occidental Steamship Company provided daily passenger service from Key West to Havana and all of that is part of this incredible story.

The reader may be aware that there have been several books written on or about the Key West Extension, but except for the very first one, Pat Parks' original 1968 "The Railroad That Died at Sea," which, although giving a brief history of the line, focused on the terrible Labor Day, 1935 hurricane, which ended service on the Keys segment of the railroad, the others have either dealt almost exclusively with the construction and engineering challenges of building the railroad that went to sea (Dr. Dan Gallagher's heavily researched "Florida's Great Ocean Railway" the single finest example of that genre) or of and on the September second, 1935 storm, which swept away more than forty miles of roadbed and right of way and killed more than 800 people. Those books, of which there have been several, also discussed, to relatively limited extents, the aftermath of the storm.

This book, then, is a first: it is the first book written on that great project that will not only explain how and why the route to Key West was chosen and who the important figures were during the railroad's construction, but it will also examine and discuss the daily operation of the road, the reason for building the Long Key Fishing Camp (the Flagler System's only casual inn or resort), the later construction by the hotel company of the Casa Marina at Key West and how the railroad was maintained. The chapters include, for the first time in print, photos of many of the stations and the rights of way and, of course, the bridges as well as views in, of and at the Trumbo Island, Key West terminal, in effect, bringing the operation of this great railroad to life.

Although discussing the 1935 hurricane (with photos never before published) the book concludes with a look not only at the conversion to the over-the-sea highway following that storm but with a chapter devoted to the memory of the great project, and to those who have worked so hard and for so long to insure that what was done to connect the Keys to the mainland between 1904 and 1912 will never be forgotten, hence tribute is warmly paid, as the finale of the book, to, among others, Claudia Pennington, Director of the Key West Art & Historical Society and President of the Board of Directors, David White and their colleagues, for the magnificent exhibit at the Custom House in Key West which will forever memorialize the great task; to historians Joan and the late Wright Langley, Irving Eyster and Dr. Dan Gallagher, whose efforts have preserved and maintained so much in photographs and information; and to Ed Swift, who has done so much to preserve the memories of the Extension.

Now, enjoy your ride on the oversea railway but do be sure, enroute, to join me for lunch at Long Key Fishing Camp and relish the freshly caught broiled pompano, the key lime pie and the iced coffee, and while we are there perhaps Zane Grey will stop to chat. In any event, take your coach or parlor car seat or settle back in your Pullman sleeping car room and re-live with me the greatest (railroad) story ever told.

## Meeting of March 10, 2011

The meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was called to order by chairman John Leynes. Six members were present, including new member John Helberg, and one guest, Carl Corsi.

Secretary's Report: The minutes from the February 10, 2011 meeting were approved.

Treasurer's Report: Robert Van Nest reported via phone with chairman Leynes that the savings account has \$4,304.32 and our checking account has \$450.00. In addition, we have the two certificates of deposit. The treasurer's report was approved.

### Committee Reports:

- Newsletter: The February issue of *Southeast Limited* has been electronically sent and the mail copies will go out on Friday the 11th.
- Trip Committee: Tampa Trip: Jim Smith advised that he and Paul Newtonson will ride Amtrak to/from Tampa on March 19 & 20. They plan on visiting Ybor City, touring the Henry Plant Museum/hotel, riding Tampa streetcars and linking up with Bill Howes who is promoting membership in the R&LHS at the World's Greatest Hobby train show being held that weekend. While there, they may also see chapter member Steve Vertescher.
- Website: John Leynes reported on material to be added to the chapter website.

### Old Business:

- ACL 1504: John Leynes updated status on the proposed restoration of the locomotive. The Convention Center has advised that potential liability issues, they do not want any work being actively done on the engine while a convention center event is going on. There are no immediate plans for a work party at this time. The group is waiting on the response to a second funding grant that has been submitted.
- Railroad Music DVD: John Leynes advised that he is still working on this project.
- Palatka Railroad Preservation Society: Jim Smith will contact this group regarding another "program" exchange between our historical organizations.

### New Business:

- Chapter Priorities: First noted in our January minutes, John Leynes reviewed some of his priorities for this year. In accordance with the National R&LHS goals and objectives, he would like the chapter to work on producing historical railroad material for possible publication in our chapter's *Southeast Limited*, or the National's *Quarterly*. There was general discussion on the following items:
  1. Review possible short, or long range, that we might work on, such as: documenting history of locomotives, or depots, that still exist in Florida. Detailing the history of a Florida RR line using Bulletin #86 and other sources (perhaps Jacksonville Streetcars?).
  2. Modify our meeting format to accommodate 30 minutes for working on a project.
  3. Contact local members to increase their participation at our monthly meetings.
  4. Partner with other railroad historical organizations to focus on membership and local events.
  5. Use ads to promote the sale of our products - Lyle Key will contact the ACL/SAL Historical Society and Jim Smith will talk to Kalmbach Publishing.

Programs: There was no program this evening, but we understand that Paul Newtonson will present one for our April 14th meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

James Smith