



Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

Southeast Chapter

Newsletter No. 131 – June 2012

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West Tocol Bloomed, Fell With Railroads

By Mary Jo McTammany

Published in The Clay County Line, December 1, 2004

In more than a century and a half of Clay County's history, whole settlements have grown, thrived and all but disappeared except for overgrown, crumbling ruins or isolated mentions in yellowing government records.

West Tocol was one of these places. When Clay County was carved from Duval in 1859, homesteaders were already beginning to cluster on the west bank of the St. Johns River just south of Green Cove Springs. Steamboat schedules called the landing West Tocol to distinguish it from Tocol on the opposite side of the river.

First named by early American Indians, Tocol means "shallow crossing" and was part of a network of tribal and game trails in use for generations before the Spanish arrived. After the Civil War, steamboats again began to ply the river and life picked up in West Tocol.

It was almost at once a busy commercial landing with frequent steamship stops to load rough-sawn lumber, naval stores and seasonal crops. As newcomers settled inland, larger and larger numbers of cattle and hogs began to arrive at the dock for dispatch to markets. The dock was usually cluttered with animal skins - from bear and panther to alligator - headed for Jacksonville tanneries.

One woman, widowed when her husband was killed in a boiler explosion at the West Tocol sawmill, supported her family by selling buckets of water flowers to float, roots and all, in Jacksonville hotel fountains. A few curious travelers, mostly naturalists and independently wealthy would-be adventurers, visited but stayed only briefly at the town's rough and primitive boarding houses.

Then in the late 1800s, the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad began laying track and the first leg from Jacksonville to Palatka swerved close to the St. Johns River to include a stop at West Tocol. Operation commenced in March of 1884, and by the beginning of the tourist season the next November, the town was perfectly situated. Tourists eager to avoid an arduous and sometimes dangerous ocean voyage to reach Florida were able to travel by train all the way to West Tocol, then board the new ferry and after a short trip across the river arrive at the town's sister city on the opposite shore.

There they boarded the St. Johns Railroad for a harrowing trip in open rail cars pulled along the track by mules with little enthusiasm for the project. The brochures made this jaunt sound more impressive than it was, but it certainly gave tourists a story to tell when they returned north.

In 1982, the Flagler railroad to St. Augustine, east of the river was complete and the St. Johns Railroad closed in 1895. West Tocol, like the rest of Clay County, began a gradual decline as fickle investors and tourists flocked farther south in search of something new.

All that remains today are pilings in the river and deserted quarters built for turpentine workers in the 1930s and '40s and often mistaken for abandoned motels.

Southeast Limited

West Tocol, on the St. Johns River South of Green Cove Springs, was a thriving shipping point by rail for timber, turpentine and crops for more than three decades. Photo provided by the Clay County Archives.



The city of Tocol saw more steamboats carrying passengers going to St. Augustine via the St. Johns Railroad. The steamboat shown has a "walking beam" used to transfer the power from the steam engine to the paddlewheels. Photo provided by the Clay County Archives.



SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS

William F. Howes Jr.	Chairman
Arthur L. Towson	Vice-Chairman
Stephen J. Vertescher	Secretary
Robert L. Van Nest	Treasurer

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THE RAILWAY & LOCOMOTIVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC

Southeast Chapter

Meeting on April 12, 2012

The meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was called to order at 6:42 PM at the Acosta Conference Center in the CSX Building by Chairman Bill Howes.

Secretary's report: Minutes from the March 8, 2012 meeting were distributed and unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: A corrected Treasurer's report for March 8, 2012 was submitted and explained. Two Thousand Dollars (\$2000.00) was transferred out of the bank account for the purpose of investing The 2 year CD is due for renewal on 5/9/2012 and this money, combined with the aforementioned \$2000.00 will be reinvested in a CD for a period of one year. The Treasurer's report was distributed and approved unanimously.

Committee Reports:

Southeast Limited: Editor Jim Smith reported that the April edition had been distributed electronically.

Trip Committee: Tentative plans were made to go to the annual Folkston gathering on April 14, 2012.

Web Site: Cliff Vander Yacht reports that the April issue is on the Web site.

Old Business:

I.R.S.: The reapplication to restore our tax exempt status has begun.

ACL 1504: John Holmgren gave a report on the current status of ACL 1504 which is not doing too well. Also discussed was the projected budget and the reluctance of the Convention Center to let any one work on the locomotive.

New Business:

State Filing: Chairman Bill Howes reports that he will do the necessary paper work via computer to avoid the Four Hundred Dollar (400.00) fine if not filed by May 1, 2012. The cost for this is Sixty two Dollars (62.00).

Announcements:

April 12th: The 150th Anniversary of the Great Locomotive Chase.

Next Southeast Chapter Meeting: Will be on May 10, 2012.

Business meeting adjourned at 7:38 PM.

Program:

Tonight's Program: 614 Encore

May's Program: Will be a video whose topic is Allegheny Rails

June's Program: Will be a DVD on Chinese railroads.

Respectfully submitted by Steve Vertescher, Secretary

**A discerning young rail fan named Lyle
Insisted his railroads have style;
"The nicest of men
Prefer Miss Ellen N.,
She packs quite a lot in each mile!"
By Larry Brennan**

THE RAILWAY & LOCOMOTIVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC

Southeast Chapter

Meeting on May 10, 2012

The meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was called to order at 6.35 PM at the Acosta Conference Center in the CSX Building by Chairman Bill Howes.

Secretary's report: Minutes from the April 12, 2012 meeting were distributed and unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer's report for May 2012 was submitted and explained. Two thousand (\$2000.00) was taken out of the bank account and added to the rolling over of our maturing CD and the rate of 1.4% for fifteen (15) months was obtained. The Treasurer's report was distributed and approved unanimously.

Committee Reports:

Southeast Limited : Editor Jim Smith yet again requested articles for the Southeast Limited.

Trip Committee: The only members who attended the April 14th train fest at Folkston were Jim Smith and Chairman Bill Howes who reported that a great time was had.

Web Site: Cliff Vander Yacht reports that there is a new front page on the Web site.

Old Business:

I.R.S.: The reapplication to restore our tax exempt status is continuing.

ACL 1504: John Holmgren gave a report on the current status of ACL 1504. A grant has been applied for but a catch 22 situation exists where the money can not be granted if the equipment the funding is to be used on is allowed to further deteriorate as is the case with the unsheltered 1504.

New Business:

State Filing: Chairman Bill Howes reports that the required filing with the State has been completed prior to the deadline date of May 1, 2012 at a cost of sixty-one dollars and twenty-five cents (\$61.25).

Next Southeast Chapter Meeting: Will be on June 14, 2012.

Business meeting adjourned at 7:08 PM.

Program:

Tonight's Program: Coal trains

June's Program: Will be a video whose topic is Chinese Railroads

Respectfully submitted by Steve Vertescher, Secretary



Three chapter members enjoyed the Folkston Funnel's annual Rail Watch held on April 14th. The Weather was great and the camaraderie with other railfans was entertaining. CSX helped by providing lots of trains!