



Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

Southeast Chapter

Tracing the Florida Railroad

On February 7th & 8th, 2009, members of the Southeast Chapter conducted an overnight trip to trace the path of the Florida Railroad, Florida's first major railroad. The original route was from Fernandina on the Atlantic coast, to Cedar Key on the Gulf coast. Participants met at Reid Adam's residence in Jacksonville at 6 AM, when we loaded our gear in an eight passenger van rented for the trip. We drove to Fernandina where the first stop was made at the old depot, which is now the Fernandina Chamber of Commerce building. John Leynes, our current Vice Chairman, who is also President of his Florida Railroad Company, made brief remarks regarding the history of the railroad. The first of many pictures and video sequences were made. We toured the area noting track layout and location of related facilities. A short distance south is the local office of the First Coast Railroad, the current name of the operation between Fernandina and Yulee, which is owned by Genesee & Wyoming. There we found the FCRR EMD SW1200 #501 switcher idling and ready for service on a chilly but beautiful February morning.

A short distance west of town, a stop was made near the highway bridge on SR 200, where we viewed the railroad swing bridge over the Amelia River. Chris Frank, whose occupation is bridge structures and inspections, provided members with a print of the bridge drawing and described the construction features of the bridge. Chris is a most informative member!

The town of Yulee, named for David Levy Yulee, the first president of the line, was the next stop. John pointed out the original right-of-way, that made a direct line from east to west through Yulee. Old crossties are still in the ground, near where the line now curves to the north, intersecting with the former SAL tracks into a small yard and on to Gross, Florida. The original ROW from Yulee to Callahan was abandoned years ago, and connection now is made through Gross, and the Gross cutoff, southwesterly, to Callahan.



First Coast Railroad's #501, a vintage EMD SW 1200 idles at the ready on a chilly Saturday morning at Fernandina, Florida. Photo by Reid Adams.

Southeast Limited

Wheels at Callahan



NS – CSX Diamond



Water tower



Next, in Baldwin, we visited the location of the former diamond of the SAL and the ACL. After the merger of the two, the ACL track was abandoned due to facility redundancy between Jacksonville and Baldwin. We also made a very brief stop at the diamond interchange just north of the Baldwin yard.

Heading south, we made a brief stop in Lawtey, where the small former SAL depot building is located east of the current ROW, and across US 301. Further south, Starke found us hungry and so we stopped in to see Sonny, for some good ole fashioned southern BBQ, yummm yummm! Only one true southerner ordered the fried okra, imagine that.

Paul then directed us to the site of R. J. Corman, a railroad contractor doing work for CSX. They have a spur track off the mainline in Starke. Near that location, still in Starke, is a car lot, Dodd’s Auto Mall. Their sales office is the old depot building from Hampton, a few miles south of Starke. The structure was moved up from Waldo in the late 1960’s. We stopped in, unannounced, and Mr. Bill Dodd cordially invited us in for a look around, and told us a bit of the history of how he came to own the building. Thank you for that Bill!



Lawtey Depot 2009



Starke Depot late 1800’s

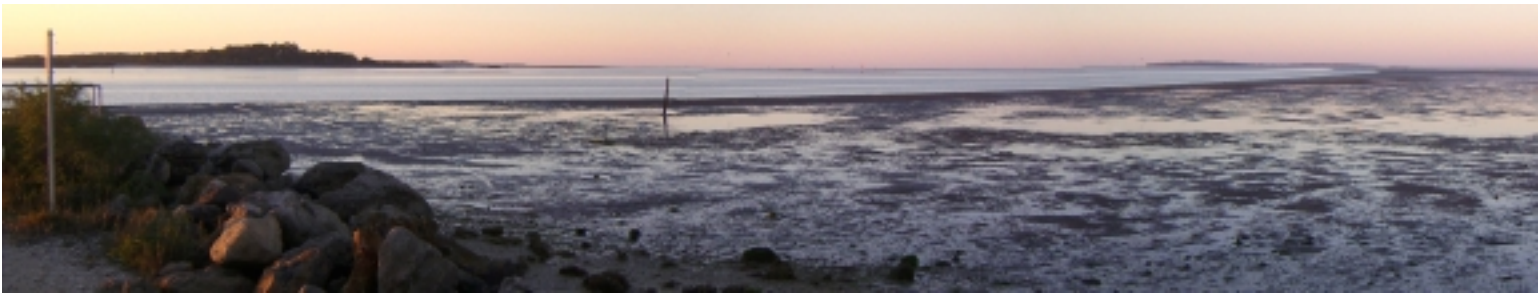


Hampton Depot 2004

Next stop was Waldo. Recapping the Florida Railroad story, Waldo was the location where, from the very beginning, plans were made and ROW graded south to Hawthorne and Wildwood for eventual connection to Tampa for a deep water port. Yulee knew that Cedar Key was only a shallow water port, but it was a quicker and less expensive way to get to the Gulf of Mexico. Even after the tracks from Waldo to Gainesville were taken up in the 1970’s, SCL left the switch in, and it is still there today. Maybe someday the tracks can be restored for the original line. We noted the location where the tracks of the Georgia Southern & Florida RR crossed US 301 south of Starke.

For the editor, one of the two most interesting locations we “discovered” was the large turntable pit in Waldo. Being a Florida native, and having roots in Archer and Cedar Key, I have been through Waldo probably hundreds of times, but never had any idea that remnants of the turntable existed! Thanks Paul, for that information. Chris estimated the turntable to be about eighty feet in diameter, it was a big one!

See pictures for Waldo on next page.



Panoramic photo by John A. Leynes Jr, February 8th,



Swing bridge over the Amelia River, open position, (left), former SAL Yulee depot as it appeared in 1987, (right), Depot photo by W. F. Beckum, supplied by Jim Garner, SEC founding member.

The now abandoned ROW was located at two different places between Yulee and Callahan, where the embankment is still clearly visible. Callahan is next along the route. We were fortunate that several members of the West Nassau Historical Society were having a work day at the depot. Jim Hendricks and Hugh Graham took time to welcome the unannounced visitors and gave us a tour of their restored building and grounds. The highlight was a pair of wheel sets that had been recently discovered at a construction project east of town. The wheels were of cast hollow center design, now banned, cast at Savannah, Georgia, which indicated late 1800's construction! During our stop, several trains transited Callahan on the CSX mainline double tracks just west of the depot. With a few driving corrections, we located the diamond of Norfolk Southern and CSX. Between there and Baldwin, with local assistance, we located a small water tower of current residential design that we believed to be the location of a watering facility of long ago.

Southeast Chapter Officer Note: Our newly elected chairman, Reid Adams, PE, Professional Civil Engineer, has been assigned to a large highway reconstruction project in Seattle, Washington, lasting about 10 months. In his absence, Vice Chairman John Leynes will fill in for Reid as acting Chairman.

Announcements:

(Our regular meetings are the 2nd Thursday of the month @ 6:30 PM, in the CSX Bldg., 500 Water St. Downtown Jacksonville, FL)
Next Meeting with the new 2009 Officers: March 12th

June 18-21st, 2009 - R&LHS Convention, Portland, Maine

SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS

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Robert Van Nest	Treasurer	

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Our visit coincided with a record low tide in Cedar Key Sunday AM, 1.1 feet below normal.

Sunday morning found most of us up in time to watch a beautiful sunrise over the Gulf. There were no clouds to enhance the sunset or sunrise, as a cold front had just moved over the area. However, one small plume appeared to the southeast, which was from the Crystal River nuclear plant. A check of my mapping program revealed that Crystal River is 25 miles from Cedar Key and can be seen most of the time. Tim Miller, John's guest, joined us on the trip to take video for a DVD chronicle we expect to produce.



John Leynes & Tim Miller



Crystal River power plant plume



Sunrise "Honeymoon Shack"

After watching sunrise, we had a good breakfast at Ann's Café, another spot favorite with the locals. While waiting for the tide to come up some for our boat ride to Seahorse Key, we found the second favorite location for the editor, the "Trestle Trail". This is a 0.6 mile portion of the ROW embankment on Cedar Key, that leads to a channel heading toward the main pier. As with Waldo, I have been to Cedar Key many times, but did not know this was there. We all walked the trail to the channel and explored the area and pilings.



**From right to left, Chris Frank, Reid Adams, Robert Van Nest, Larry Shugart, Art Towson, and John Leynes.
Due to the extreme low tide, we were able to get down to the piling structures for closer examination**



Switch SW to Gainesville in Waldo



Retaining walls of abandoned turntable in Waldo



Southwest from Waldo is Gainesville. About half way between, we crossed Hatchet Creek where a large wooden trestle was constructed for the original line. It was destroyed by Union forces during the Civil War and had to be rebuilt. It is referenced in R&LHS Bulletin 86, the story of Florida's railroads, which is available through our chapter. We generally agreed that the old ROW between Waldo and Gainesville was the location now occupied by the eastern-most lanes, that is the northbound lanes, of SR 24. In Gainesville at the junction of SR 24 and SR 20, University Ave., a few box cars can be seen east of the intersection. Those cars were part of a Victoria's Station restaurant that existed on that location close to twenty years ago.

We followed as closely as possible, the route of the Florida Railroad, last under the control of the SAL, through Gainesville. The main stop we made was at the site of the former SAL depot building. The building, which had a very large freight extension, had been moved a short distance to the south from the site. The original site is apparently contaminated and is to be rehabbed, before the structure is moved back as part of a rail/trail park facility. Due to the editors over scheduling of activities for the trip, we were not able to spend as much time as desired in Gainesville, and pressed on toward Cedar Key. We made a brief drive-through in Archer just to get a glimpse of the old SAL depot and the little Baldwin 2-4-0 at the Maddox Foundry & Machine Works. We were to backtrack to Archer Sunday afternoon for a tour and presentation.



Former SAL depot in 2004 at the original site, and passenger section at the temporary location.

We were able to see a number of locations where the old ROW and embankments still exist, along the south side of SR 24 from Archer all the way to Cedar Key. We managed to arrive in Cedar Key in time to check in to the motel, freshen-up a bit and catch the beautiful sunset, prior to a great seafood dinner at Ann's Other Place on the pier overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The view is in site of Atsena Otie Island where there was a thriving community of residents, and was also the location of the Eberhard Faber pencil mill, where cedar planks were cut and shipped north for completion. Atsena Otie, which I understand is the Creek Indian phrase for Island of Cedar, was virtually wiped out in what was called a Tidal Wave, what we know today as a storm surge, by the hurricane of 1896. The editor's grandmother was a 12 year old child living on Atsena Otie when the hurricane hit. Her story can be found on the Florida Railroad website at <http://www.flarr.com>.



So many photos, so many side stories, we strayed from the railroad theme for a special visit to Seahorse Key. Left to right, Chris Frank and Henry Coulter Marine Superintendent of Seahorse Preserve, the Seahorse Key Lighthouse, Larry Shugart & Dr. John Andrews, whose father founded the Fiber Brush factory at Cedar Key.

After the visit to Seahorse, we returned to Way Key for a special guided tour of the Cedar Key Historical Society by Dr. John Andrews. His father founded the Standard Manufacturing Company, that made brushes from the fiber of the cabbage palm trees, which are also abundant in the area. He is a most courteous and kind gentleman who always takes time to share his knowledge of Cedar Key history. Thank you Dr. John! Moving on to the back track, we headed back northeast to Otter Creek. There, just a few miles south on US 98, in the community of Gulf Hammock, is located the “three spot”. It is a 2-8-0 wood burning locomotive used by the Patterson – McGinnis lumber company of long ago in Levy county. The engine is located in a wayside park that had the land obtained by Southeast Chapter member Ed Mueller, when he worked for the Florida DOT, years ago. It has a fence around it now and has deteriorated badly. The photo below was taken in 1987 before the fence was erected.



The P & M 3 Spot 2-8-0 Steam Locomotive - Gulf Hammock Florida - Photo by John A. Leynes Jr. June 1987

We are out of time and out of room for this issue. To wrap it up, we stopped along the former ACL ROW where we surveyed a steel deck bridge along US 98. Then on to Archer where a lecture was given by Harold McGee, a noted local railroad historian in Alachua County, in the conference room at the Maddox Foundry & Machine Works. Harold's presentation was one of the highlights of our trip! Chase Hope, Great Grandson of founder Hittup Maddox gave us a tour of the foundry facilities, an inside view. Running out of time and steam, we made a quick tour of the Archer Historical Society's Depot Museum, hosted by Phil Denton, president of the society, and then headed home. E-mail John at john@flarr.com for questions or comments.

Our deepest appreciation is sincerely expressed to all these folks who took the time out of their busy schedules to make our trip full, enlightening and enjoyable, and to Reid and Paul for the planning!