Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad.

The Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad Company was chartered in 1875, but actual construction of the Jacksonville-Palatka division did not commence until March, 1883. Robert H. Coleman, millionaire coal operator of Cornwall, Pa., was the principal promoter of the enterprise. The line was completed in one year, the first train leaving Jacksonville for Palatka on March 6, 1884; the engineer was Daniel Preston and the conductor Dennis Mahoney.

In 1885 the Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad Company began the construction of a line from Palatka to Sanford over the right-of-way of the Palatka & Indian River Railway Company, by arrangement and proper transfer. This link was completed February 26, 1886, and furnished through connection with the South Florida Railroad at Sanford, the first direct rail route from Jacksonville to Tampa. A year later, in April, 1887, the Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad Company acquired outright the ownership of the Palatka-Sanford division of the Palatka & Indian River Railway.

As the outgrowth of a suit by the American Construction Company, which had originally the contract for the construction of the J. T. & K. W. R. R., Mason Young, on August 4, 1892, was appointed receiver of the road. Then followed a great deal of wrangling among the directors who soon split into two factions called the “ins” and the “outs”. The court proceedings wore on for seven years, during which time there were several different receivers. After a number of attempted public sales with restrictions, the court finally issued an order for the sale of the property without restrictions. At the sale, April 3, 1899, the Plant Investment Company bought it for $600,000 and at once merged it with the Savannah, Florida & Western Railway system. Long before this, in the early 1880’s, Mr. Plant had acquired a controlling interest in the South Florida Railroad and extended it to Tampa; thus with the purchase of the Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad, the Plant Investment Company had brought together the various links to form a trunk line from the North through Jacksonville to Tampa, comprising the Florida railroads as originally built under the names:

Waycross & Florida (Waycross to St. Marys River),
East Florida (St. Marys River to Jacksonville).