Florida East Coast Railway

Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River Railroad.

The original charter for building this railroad was granted in March, 1879, but before construction began the Florida Legislature passed certain land grant laws that were favorable to railroad companies and in order to procure the benefits of these inducements the company obtained a new charter on February 28, 1881. Grading for the road was started immediately and the line was completed and put in operation in two years. It was a narrow gauge railroad and ran from South Jacksonville to St. Augustine.

January 1, 1886, the railroad changed ownership. A circular published in the local press stated that the Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad company had bought it. Henry M. Flagler, who at that time was president of the J. T. & K. W., was the real purchaser of the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River railroad, but it was known to the public and operated as the St. Augustine Division of the Jacksonville, Tampa & Key West Railroad for a number of years. The steam ferry between Jacksonville and South Jacksonville was also purchased and operated in connection with the railroad; this too was publicly called the J. T. & K. W. ferry.

Mr. Flagler immediately rebuilt the Jacksonville, St. Augustine & Halifax River railroad, changed the gauge to standard, and equipped it with the best rolling stock obtainable. It is said that he bought the railroad for the purpose of hauling material for the Ponce de Leon hotel which was then under construction. However, he soon embarked in railroad enterprises upon a great scale and ultimately developed the entire Florida east coast from St. Augustine to Key West. The building of the over-sea railroad to Key West was the world's romance in railroad construction.

Henry M. Flagler rode into Key West January 22, 1912, on the first through train from Jacksonville over the completed line. Peculiarly similar to the case of H. B. Plant, he died soon after the fulfillment of his greatest desire—at West Palm Beach on May 20, 1913.

The poorly constructed little 3-foot railroad between South Jacksonville and St. Augustine was the parent of the Florida East Coast Railway System of today. Its history after Mr. Flagler bought it is largely one of maintenance, as