

# FLORIDA EAST COAST RAILWAY KEY WEST EXTENTION TIMELINE

Compiled by the Key West Art & Historical Society

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## 1822

- January 19: In Havana, John W. Simonton purchases the island of Key West for \$200 from Juan Pablo Salas, who had acquired it for services rendered from the governor of Florida in 1815. Simonton sold three sections of the island to John Whitehead, John Fleeming and Pardon Greene.

## 1829

- December 29: Former commander of the naval anti-pirate squadron based in Key West, Commodore David Porter, writes to the Secretary of the Navy noting Key West "is to the Gulf of Mexico, etc., what Gibraltar is to the Mediterranean."

## 1830

- January 2: Henry Morrison Flagler, the future builder of the Overseas Extension, is born in Hopewell, New York.

## 1831

- The Key West Gazette refers to a potential railroad linking the Florida Keys with the mainland, and that Key West could serve as an important naval base, a notion that then Lieutenant Matthew Perry had argued in March 1822 when he hoisted the American flag and claimed Key West for the United States.

## 1835

- The Key West Enquirer, the newspaper which began publication in 1834, advocates the construction of a railroad linking the Keys and the mainland and further north to Washington D.C. and New York City.

## 1844

- May 24: Samuel Morse transmits the first message on a U.S. telegraph line (Washington D.C. - Baltimore).

## 1845

- March 3: Florida becomes a U.S. state.

## 1850

- George Stephenson's cast-iron railroad bridge is opened at Newcastle-on-Tyne.
- Railway mileage in operation: U.S. 9,015, U.K. 6,635.

## 1857

- On July 12, after decades of section construction, the first train to travel the complete route on Vienna-Trieste railway through the Alps begins a new chapter in the history of European railway travel.

## 1860

- Railway mileage in operation: U.S. 30,600; U.K. 10,410; Russia 900.

## 1866

- January 2: The state of Florida grants the International Ocean Telegraph Company an exclusive right to establish a commercial link between Key West and Cuba. Shortly thereafter, working for the International Ocean Telegraph Company, J.C. Bailey surveys the Keys for both the possibility of a railroad link and the feasibility of running the telegraph wires to Key West.

## 1867

- Initially known as Rockefeller, Andrews & Flagler, the company's principals form the Standard Oil Company in Cleveland, Ohio.
- June 14: Mary Lily Kenan, Flagler's third wife, is born in North Carolina.

## 1870

- October 17: The Great Southern Railroad, intended to run from Millen, Georgia, to Key West, is incorporated.

## 1872

- July: The Brooklyn Bridge opens for business allowing vehicular and pedestrian traffic between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

## 1877

- Standard Oil moves its headquarters to New York City and Flagler relocates his family from Cleveland, Ohio.

## 1878

- Physicians advise Flagler to take his first wife Mary, suffering from a lung ailment, to Jacksonville, Florida for the winter. During this visit, Flagler focuses his attention on developing Florida as a resort destination, a vision he calls 'a new American Riviera', for which he later builds luxurious hotels along the state's east coast.

## 1880

- Railway mileage in operation: U.S., 87,801; U.K., 17,935; France, 16,430; Russia, 12,200.

## 1883

- General John B. Gordon secures a franchise to build a railroad from Georgia to Key West, but he abandons work before ever reaching the Florida coast.

## 1885

- An article in Railway World states that Flagler has purchased the lower half of Key Largo and parts of other islands.
- Flagler purchases the Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Halifax River Railway, to ensure the delivery of supplies for his three St. Augustine hotels under construction.
- In Chicago, workers complete the construction of what is known as the first skyscraper, the Home Insurance Building; demolished in 1931.
- November 7: The financier of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway drives the final spike to complete the line after nearly five years; the first regularly scheduled trains begin operation in June 1886.

## 1888

- The first refrigerated railroad car is put into operation; the Chinese open the first railroad in their country. Apparently the first patent for a refrigerated train car was granted in 1867. We might want to do more research.

## 1889

- The Florida legislature sets aside 10 million acres of land across the state to be sold to entrepreneurs willing to build new railroad lines.

## 1890

- Railway mileage in operation: U.S., 125,000; France, 20,800; U.K., 20,073; Russia, 19,000.

## 1891

- Flagler talks with Jefferson B. Browne, then president of the Florida state senate, of the merits of building a rail line to Key West.
- Flagler is introduced to Mary Lily Kenan, who later becomes his third wife.
- The Russians begin the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, completed in 1904.

## 1892

- Flagler changes the name of his Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Halifax River Railway to the Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railway.

## 1893

- April 29: The Florida state legislature grants a charter to Flagler's Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Indian River Railway Company to extend its lines "on and across the Florida Keys to Key West," thus beginning the process that culminates in the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway to the southernmost city.

## 1894

- An international consortium completes the first railroad over the Andes Mountains in South America.

- April 2: Flagler extends his railroad from St. Augustine to West Palm Beach to bring guests to his Hotel Royal Poinciana which opened in February.
- December 28: Florida experiences its coldest weather in over 100 years when the temperature fell to 19°F in central Florida, devastating the citrus fruit industry that year.

### 1895

- February 6: Another hard freeze hits the state. These freezes ruin citrus crops and vegetable farms as far south as Palm Beach. Miami landowner Mrs. Julia Tuttle convinces Flagler about the potential development of the area and she offers Flagler 100 acres of her land for a railroad terminal, railroad yards, and a hotel site.
- April 3: The Bartow Courier-Informant reports that engineers say that a railroad through the Keys is possible and notes Flagler is working out the details.
- September: Flagler changes the name of the Jacksonville, St. Augustine, and Indian River Railway to the Florida East Coast Railway (F.E.C.).

### 1896

- April: The F.E.C. Railway reaches Miami, and the first passenger train arrives at the new end station at Biscayne Bay. At this point, Miami is a small community of approximately 300 people.
- June: Jefferson B. Browne publishes an essay, "Across the Gulf by Rail to Key West," in National Geographic extolling the geographic and economic advantages of linking Key West to the mainland.
- July 28: The city of Miami is incorporated.

### 1897

- January 16: Flagler's Hotel Royal Palm opens in Miami.

### 1898

- French officials open the Paris metro system.
- February 15: The U.S.S. Maine's boiler explodes causing it to sink in Havana harbor with a loss of 266 crewmen, an event exploited by those in America supporting the removal of Spain from Cuba. This leads to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War.

- April 25: The United States Congress declares war on Spain.
- Summer: The Spanish-American War causes the increased importance of Key West as a strategic military and economic location.
- August 12: Spain and the U.S. sign an armistice in Washington D.C.
- December 10: The Treaty of Paris is signed. Spain agrees to the independence of Cuba, cedes Puerto Rico and Guam to the U.S., and sells the Philippines to the U.S. for \$20 million.

## 1900

- Flagler's Peninsular and Occidental Steamship Line (P&O) opens for business linking Miami, Key West, Havana, and Tampa.

## 1901

- August 24: Flagler marries his third wife, Mary Lily Kenan.

## 1902

- Flagler's engineers survey the Everglades to determine if a cross-state railroad is possible and decide it is not.
- William Krome begins survey work for possible extension of rail line from Miami to Key West.
- June 28: The U.S. Congress authorizes President Theodore Roosevelt to purchase the rights of the French Panama Company and to acquire from Columbia perpetual control of the canal zone.

## 1903

- The first motor car in Key West is a 1903 Oldsmobile owned by Dr. John B. Maloney who toots around the island in his spare time.
- January 6: The members of the Florida Railroad Commission at its organizational meeting in Tallahassee elect Jefferson B. Browne of Key West as chairman.
- June 16: With a capital of \$100,000, Henry Ford founds the Ford Motor Company.
- December 17: Orville and Wilbur Wright make a successful flight in a petrol engine powered airplane.

## 1904

- May 4: The United States formally takes control of the Panama Canal Zone and begins construction of the canal.
- July 2: Flagler appoints Joseph C. Meredith as the F.E.C. Railway Chief Engineer.
- End July: Workers complete the F.E.C. Railway from Miami to Homestead.

## 1905

- January: Flagler and his associates leave Miami by steamer for a tour of the proposed route of the F.E.C. Railway Overseas Extension. The trip includes a meeting with leading citizens of Key West. Following the tour, preliminary surveys, mappings of channels and water over the Florida Keys are completed.
- April: The F.E.C. Railway begins construction of the Extension from the mainland to Key West and completes the first rail section connecting Homestead to Jewfish Creek. Flagler says he expects the entire Extension to be in operation on January 1, 1908.
- The F.E.C. Railway appoints Clarence S. Coe as the Resident Engineer.
- Workers begin construction of Camp No.10 two miles from the western end of Vaca Key, which later becomes a large-scale terminal, and eventually the city of Marathon.
- June 28: The New York Herald reports Flagler, aged 74, plans to extend his F.E.C. Railway from Miami to Key West mentioning the connection with the acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone.
- July 31: The Miami Metropolis, F.E.C. Railway's official newspaper, confirms plans for the Overseas Extension.
- November 2: The Overseas Extension breaks ground in Key West.

## 1906

- Under the direction of Howard Trumbo, the F.E.C. Railway Construction Division begins building a landfill for a train terminal in Key West that eventually covers 134 acres of land. The Division purchases two dredges to work on the project: the Grampus and the George W. Allen.
- The F.E.C. Railway builds the first of ten cement mixers, its most intricate machinery.

- February 22: The F.E.C. Railway opens a new twelve-foot wide bridge connecting Stock Island with Key West for the first time, now called Cow Key Bridge. VERIFY
- October 17: A hurricane destroys much of the F.E.C. Railway's work south of Miami, specifically the construction site at Long Key, leading to the opinion of many that this project is "Flagler's Folly." Many workers die when their houseboat is washed out to sea; the unofficial death toll of the storm is 164 men killed and 81 injured.

## 1907

- Railroad mileage in operation: U.S., 236,900; Russia, 44,600; Germany, 36,000; India, 29,800; France, 29,700; Austria-Hungary, 25,800; U.K. and Ireland, 23,100; Canada, 22,400.
- February 5: The Overseas Extension's Jewfish Creek drawbridge begins to work after a difficult installation.
- April 15: At 4:00a.m., the boiler of the George W. Allen dredger explodes killing two F.E.C. Railway firemen and injuring seven others.
- May: The Central Supply Depot in Islamorada is fully operational.
- July: Two F.E.C. Railway workers die from drinking too much "Tiger Booze" supplied by Key West bootleggers who the sheriff's deputies arrest and charge with murder.
- Fall: F.E.C. Railway workers finish the railbed on Stock Island.

## 1908

- January 22: The Overseas Extension is a half-finished dream of one hundred and six miles. Flagler rides the first train from Miami, crossing the Long Key viaduct, to the Knight's Key dock, his railroad's furthest point south.
- February: The F.E.C. Railway inaugurates passenger service from Miami to Knights Key and the P&O steamer, Montauk, begins daily trips from Knight's Key to Key West and on to Havana.
- April: Workers complete the F.E.C. Railway's machine shops and repair facilities on Boot Key, near present-day Marathon.
- Fall: Flagler opens the former workers' camp on Long Key as Long Key Fishing Camp. It serves wealthy winter visitors who wanted to feel they are "camping", including the novelist Zane Grey.



## 1909

- Henry Ford introduces the first Model T motor vehicle.
- January: The first luxury passenger train travels from New York City leaving at 2:10p.m. to Knight's Key arriving at 7:30a.m. two days later.
- February 7: After inspecting all the work stations between Knights Key and Key West, Flagler arrives by boat on the island.
- February 19: Will Pinder has a small force of men building a mess hall on Trumbo Island that was later used to feed the railroad workers.
- March: The F.E.C. Railway moves its construction headquarters from Miami to Pigeon Key anticipating the construction of the Seven Mile Bridge.
- April 20: Workers install the first steel span of the Seven Mile Bridge at approximately the same time Joseph C. Meredith, Chief Engineer, dies in a Miami hospital. Following Meredith's death, William Krome takes over as Chief Construction Engineer.
- May: A dynamite explosion kills seven workers and seriously injures seven others at the west end of Cudjoe Key.
- June 30: F.E.C. Railway workers begin laying track on Big Pine Key.
- August 21: The schooner Liberty sails from Key West to the channel between Long Key and Maticumbe carrying fill to enable the construction of railroad bridges.
- September 1: A coroner's jury rules a dynamite explosion that killed twelve railroad workers on Boca Chica Key was caused by someone tossing a match into a box of explosives.
- October 10-11: A hurricane passes over the Florida Keys causing millions of dollars' worth of damage, setting the completion date of the Overseas Extension back by two years. The F.E.C. Railway's tugboat Sybill capsizes and thirteen of her crew drown.
- October 14: The F.E.C. Railway announces that road beds on Stock Island, Boca Chica and Sugarloaf Keys have been washed out.

## 1910

- May 12: F.E.C. Railway workers drive the first spike at the Trumbo Island railhead in Key West.

- October 17-18: A hurricane with gusts up to 110 miles per hour, inflicts major structural damage to the Seven Mile Bridge and the tracks from the mainland to Knights Key Station, causing a further delay in completing the Overseas Extension.

## 1911

- April 23: Flagler arrives in Key West to survey the 134-acre landfill, now Trumbo Point, created to accommodate the trains scheduled to reach there the following year.
- June 21: Key West civic leaders form the Railroad Celebration Committee to prepare for the arrival of the first train.
- August 6: The F.E.C. Railway announces that the Bahia Honda Bridge will be completed by January 1, 1912.
- November 11: The F.E.C. Railway's stern-wheel steamer Kennedy backs into the launch Ida Belle Lounds causing damage to both vessels and one death.
- December: F.E.C. Railway workers moving east from Key West and west from Big Pine Key meet on Sugarloaf Key, thus opening the last twenty-seven miles of track.
- December 16: Flagler and F.E.C. Railway President, Joseph. R. Parrott, arrive in Key West on an inspection tour.

## 1912

- The F.E.C. Railway announces that it will provide fifteen Pullman cars and two dining cars in Key West to add accommodations for visitors to the First Train Celebration. The steamers Halifax and Governor Cobb also will serve as sleeping quarters.
- January 21: Engineers place the final steel plate girder on the Seven Mile Bridge. Before Flagler arrives from Miami the following day, Engine 201 tests the tracks between Marathon and Key West.
- January 22: The first F.E.C. Railway train, pulling cars 90 and 91 ("The Rambler"), arrives in Key West with the 82-year-old Flagler and his wife Mary Lily Kenan on board. The Overseas Extension culminates the completion of his dream to connect the island with the mainland by rail. Mayor Joseph N. Fogarty formally welcomes Flagler in front of the largest crowd in Key West history. A weeklong celebration ensues with banquets, concerts, fireworks and parades.

- January 23: U.S. Army Major Sam J. Wolf serves as Grand Marshal of the celebration parade beginning at 11:00a.m. Mayor Fogarty plays master of ceremonies at an evening banquet honoring Flagler at the Marine Barracks on the Naval Station where General Robert Shaw Oliver reads a message from President Taft. Flagler makes a brief speech in which he predicts, "Key West will have a population of over 50,000 people within ten years from this date."
- January 24: At 6:22a.m., The Rambler carries Flagler north to his home at Whitehall ending his final visit to Key West. The city holds a display of fireworks and a band concert on Duval Street.
- January 26: The first excursion train leaves Key West for Long Key carrying 123 passengers who, after a short stay there, return to Key West. The round-trip fare is \$2.60.
- January 29: The financiers and art collectors J. Pierpont Morgan and Charles S. Mellon arrive in Key West in Morgan's private rail car on their way to Cuba.
- February 8: The Key West Fish Company transports its first shipment of iced fish by rail to New York City.
- April 15: The R.M.S. Titanic crashes into an iceberg on its maiden voyage and sinks with the loss of 1,513 passengers.
- May 9: The F.E.C. Railway completes the installation of a telephone system to dispatch trains, while retaining the telegraph as a backup.
- May 13: The P&O Steamship Line announces a roundtrip excursion rate of \$5.00 from Key West to Havana on the Olivette and Mascotte.
- August: A Havana newspaper reports service between Havana and New York City: "Leave Havana, 10:30 A.M. Arrive Key West 6:30 P.M. Leave Key West, 7:30 P.M. Arrive Jacksonville 1:55 P.M. Arrive New York, 7:55 P.M. ...Only two nights en route between Havana and New York!"
- December 21: President William H. Taft arrives in Key West by train, tours the city and attends a luncheon in his honor before sailing on a U.S. Navy ship to inspect the Panama Canal construction progress.

### 1913

- May 20: Henry Flagler dies at his home Whitehall in Palm Beach at the age of 83 and is buried in St. Augustine at Memorial Presbyterian Church and Columbarium.

- May 27: Flagler's will is made public for the first time, leaving the bulk of his estate to his wife Mary Lily Kenan under a trusteeship. Trustees of the estate are Joseph R. Parrott, William H. Beardsley, and William R. Kenan, Jr.

#### 1914

- August 15: The Panama Canal officially opens.

#### 1915

- January 8: The P&O freight car ferries, Henry M. Flagler, Estrada Palma, and Joseph R. Parrott inaugurate service between Key West and Havana. Each ferry holds twenty-six large railroad freight cars.

#### 1916

- The F.E.C. Railway's complex at Trumbo Point includes amenities for the workers, a large office building an even larger warehouse. Scattered among the spur tracks were shops for machines, carpenters, blacksmiths, a "drive-through" engine shed and two huge molasses tanks.

#### 1917

- July 27: Mary Lily Kenan, Flagler's third wife, dies at the age of 50.

#### 1918

- February: The F.E.C. Hotel Company (a subsidiary of the Railway) purchases 6.5 acres of land and 1,200 feet of shoreline. Construction begins on the Casa Marina Resort shortly thereafter.

#### 1920

- The population of Key West is 18,749, not quite the 50,000 Flagler predicted on January 22, 1912, the day after the first train arrived from the mainland.
- December 31: After years of work at a cost of almost \$2 million, the Casa Marina Resort holds its grand opening with a New Year's Eve ball.

#### 1921

- At Cross Key, near Key Largo, an eastbound freight train crashes headlong into a westbound train carrying workers to Key West for pay day. The locomotives are

demolished, a flagman and two workers are killed and engineers and firemen save themselves by jumping. (1921 or 1922?).

### 1922

- Seven F.E.C. carloads of racehorses arrive from Montreal en route to Havana. At Cross Key, 111 miles from Key West, an eastbound freight train crashed headlong into a westbound train carrying workers to Key West for pay day. The locomotives were demolished, engineers and firemen saved themselves by jumping and a flagman and two workers were killed. (1921 or 1922?)

### 1924

- From 1924-1925, 3,500 carloads of pineapples from Havana pass through Key West by rail on their way to the mainland.

### 1926

- Monroe County citizens overwhelmingly approve a \$2.5 million bond issue to launch construction of the "Overseas Highway."

### 1927

- On the Seven Mile Bridge above Pigeon Key, the water tank of a freight train carrying 110 cars of pineapples blows up and hurls the chassis of the locomotive into the ocean, killing the engineer and badly injuring the fireman.

### 1928

- January 25: The Overseas Highway opens from Miami to Key West via Card Sound Road with a car ferry covering 40 miles across the water from Lower Matecumbe Key to No Name Key.

### 1929

- October 24: The Wall Street stock exchange crashes, beginning the Great Depression, adversely affecting the F.E.C.'s hotel and railroad empire.

### 1930

- Ida Alice Shroud, Flagler's second wife, dies at the age of 82.

### 1931

- Financial hard times curb travel on the famous Havana Special route resulting in only one daily arrival in and departure from Key West.
- The round trip fare for travel on the F.E.C. Railway from Miami to Havana is \$24.00. A daily round-trip excursion rate from Key West to Miami costs \$4.75 and only \$2.50 on Sundays.
- February 16: Officials open an additional section of the Overseas Highway allowing motor vehicles to drive from mainland Florida to Matecumbe Key, then by ferry to Grassy Key, by road to Key Vaca, by ferry to No Name Key, then by road to Key West.
- September 1: The Great Depression forces the F.E.C. Railway to default on its mortgage bond interest payments, becoming a ward of the Federal Bankruptcy Court, but continues limited service.

### 1933

- The Florida Legislature creates the Overseas Road and Toll Bridge District to complete a highway from Lower Matecumbe Key to Big Pine Key thus eliminating the necessity for ferries.

### 1934

- The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (F.E.R.A.) opens labor camps for unemployed World War I veterans to repair railroad beds in the Upper Keys.
- July 1: Most Key West businesses fold as a result of the Great Depression and half the citizens are on relief. The city declares bankruptcy and requests the state take over its responsibilities.

### 1935

- August: Construction begins on a major highway bridge below Lower Matecumbe Key.
- September 2-3: A disastrous category 5 hurricane devastates the Middle Keys killing hundreds and washing away miles of embankment. The large bridges survive with minor damage. Among the dead are 400 World War I veterans working on the railroad. The storm left the already distressed F.E.C. Railway in ruins and Key West inaccessible by direct land route for the first time since 1912.

The Railway is financially unable to reconstruct the rail line from Homestead to Key West.

- Despite the hurricane devastation, the F.E.R.A. publicity campaign is successful in that approximately 40,000 tourists are able to use cars and ferries to visit the Florida Keys.

### 1936

- The F.E.C. Railway successfully petitions to the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the remaining rails on the Overseas Extension to allow the construction of highway roads over the former railroad bridges.
- May 30: In Washington D.C., The Public Works Administration approves a \$3.6 million loan to the Overseas Road and Toll Bridge District to construct a highway using the former railroad bridges.
- October 10: Bids for construction of several sections of the Overseas Highway open with high hopes for a completed highway before the close of the 1937-38 winter season.

### 1937

- April 29: William R. Porter and Norberg Thompson offer to buy Trumbo Point terminal, including the docks and yards from the F.E.C. Railway for a sum of \$90,000.
- May 21: A federal judge authorizes the Receivers of the F.E.C. Railway to sell the Trumbo Point terminal (except the Granday Turtle Canning Company) to the highest bidder, Mr. S.C. Anderson of Coral Gables for \$146,000.

### 1938

- July 2: Officials open of the Overseas Highway from Card Sound to Key West, thus re-establishing a direct land route between the mainland and Key West.