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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gregg M. Turner. *A Journey into Florida Railroad History.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xii + 283 pp. $27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3233-7.

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Published on H-Florida (October, 2009)
Commissioned by Jeanine A. Clark Bremer

Turner's Worthwhile Journey

Countless communities in Florida trace their beginning to the establishment of railroads. Given this fact, it is surprising that, until recently, the body of literature on Florida history has lacked a manageable volume on railroads. While certainly valuable, the existing histories of Florida railroads often focus on one company, one region, or one period, and are frequently more concerned with imagery than analysis. To be sure, crafting a broader history of this ever-evolving and ultimately massive system presents a great challenge. With *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*, veteran railroad historian Gregg M. Turner takes on this challenge and does a fine job of providing a broad yet digestible analysis of railway development in the Sunshine State.

Turner chooses a roughly chronological structure for this book. Chapter 1 offers a valuable discussion of the process of creating a railroad, from the promotional and capital raising stage, to choosing a route and bringing a line into operation. In chapter 2, he analyzes the pioneering railroads of the territorial period noting that in this era of steamboat competition and nationwide economic setbacks, only several lines came into existence. So unfavorable was the atmosphere that Florida had only one surviving railroad at statehood in 1845–the Tallahassee Railroad Company, between the capital and St. Marks. A decade later, the state of Florida provided land grants and financial assistance to railroad builders. These government incentives, as Turner explains in chapter 3, brought about five pioneers–the Florida, Atlantic, & Gulf Central Railroad; the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad; the Alabama and Florida Railroad; the St. Johns Railroad; and the Florida Railroad–all of which were, in his assessment, "the very foundation of Florida's future railroad network" (p. 57). There is probably no better discussion of Florida's territorial and antebellum railroads than what Turner offers here.

Turner focuses on the Civil War and Reconstruction period in chapter 4. The war left Florida's nascent railroad system a shambles, both physically and financially. Turner describes the tension that arose between Southern and Northern business partners, such as David Yulee and E. N. Dickerson, as well as the demands the Confederate government of Florida placed on railroads. Battered and broken, Florida's railroads languished in the years after the war and became tools of corruption and fraud as "carpetbaggers" sold worthless bonds to unknowing foreign investors.

After decades of fits and starts, railroad development finally soared across Florida in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, as Turner glowingly relates, spreading new settlement in every direction. Again, liberal land grants were crucial to this growing web of trackage. Vast agricultural opportunities, particularly in citrus cultivation and winter vegetables, fueled this long-awaited boom, and in addition to superior transportation, railroad companies offered land, wharves, phosphate storehouses, and hotels. Turner recounts the fairly well-known stories of the two Henrys–Flagler and Plant–but casts light on other big developers, including the Englishman Sir Edward Reed who grabbed up many of the failing lines to create "the state's first true railroad system," the Florida Railway and Navigation Company (p. 116). This period of bold, new development was met with a backlash from farmers who bemoaned high rates, cattle owners who decried the trains' lack of concern for their stock, angry investors who invested in routes to nowhere, and government entities pushing stronger regulations. Turning away from the mega-companies that dominated the early twentieth century (the Atlantic Coast Line, the Seaboard Line, and the Southern Railway), Turner devotes chapter 8 to a handful of smaller companies that did not fare so well. In many cases, these lines disappeared along with environmental resources–particularly timber, naval stores, and phosphate.

Though unprepared for the surge in traffic associated with the 1920s boom, Florida's leading lines managed to reap a hefty profit. Interestingly, half of the Florida East Coast Railway's revenue in the good days of the 1920s was from its Okeechobee Branch, which pierced the agricultural mecca of the Everglades region. The Great Depression (chapter 9) saw many lines abandoned. Breaking records with $29.4 million in revenue in 1926, the Florida East Coast Railway pulled a fourth of that in 1934.

Once the centerpiece of many Florida communities, railroads today more often skirt the edges. Turner, however, reminds us of their present-day importance to the state's largest industries, including agriculture, paper, and distribution and retail, and discusses the major players in the concluding chapter. While it seems clear that Turner's passion lies in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century railroads, one would be hard pressed to find a better source for understanding Florida's modern railroad history. Turner clearly has an encyclopedic knowledge of Florida's railroads, past and present. He has chased down information on some of the most obscure railroad lines–such as the short-lived St. Augustine and North Beach Railway–and straightened out the history of the better-known lines, drawing on an array of historical newspaper articles, congressional documents, railroad commission reports, manuscript collections, and secondary literature to tell the story.

In crafting a broad yet digestible history such as this one, Turner necessarily had to leave out certain topics related to Florida railroads. His descriptions of lines from long ago often list communities that are now obscure–Waylonzo, Norwills, and Nichols, for example–but provide no accompanying geographical information. In such instances, even the avid student of Florida history will be stumped. Also, there is little information in Turner's book about the life span of segregation on Florida's railroads. Similarly lacking is his discussion of the federal government's takeover of the railroad system during World War I.

Especially as the resurgence of rail travel is in the air, Turner's concise and organized work arrives in a timely manner. He has a pleasant, engaging style of writing that makes this book an enjoyable and eye-opening read that will appeal to classroom instructors and also the general reader. Florida historians will be thankful that we now have a well-executed history of railroading.

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Citation: Nicholas Linville. Review of Turner, Gregg M., *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*. H-Florida, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.
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