



Jupiter to Juno, Venus, and Mars

The Jupiter & Lake Worth Railroad became the stuff of legend in just a few years of operation. Work on the roadbed began in October, 1880 but it took almost 10 years to deliver rails in the limited cargo holds of steamships from Titusville.

Born on the Fourth of July, 1889 (or the summer of 1890) it was only later that people began calling the line the "Celestial Railroad." The first use of the name was in an article by Julian Ralph in the March 1893 issue of Harper's New Monthly Magazine. The following year another article appeared in Chamber's Journal. The unearthly name was suggested by the fact that the line ran from Jupiter to Juno with stops at Venus and Mars. Jupiter and Juno still exist, but Venus and Mars were not much more than loading platforms. Not much is written of Mars, but Venus was said to have a population of one man and two cats.

Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company: The Celestial Railroad was part of the Plant System, a network of rail lines and steamships called the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company that combined to carry freight and passengers between Tampa, Jacksonville, and Key West using Titusville as a hub. Jupiter was connected to Titusville by the JT&KW subsidiary, the Indian River Steamboat Company.

The Jupiter and Lake Worth Railroad line began where the Indian River steamships docked on the south side of the Jupiter Inlet. The line served to move goods and people between the Jupiter Inlet docks south to the steamship docks at the head of Lake Worth, a total of 7 ½ miles. Therefore, the "Lake Worth" in the rail line name refers to the lake, which we better know today as part of the Intracoastal waterway.

The railroad was a narrow-gauge line running on tracks three feet wide. The train consisted of engine and tender, and a one or two single combination passenger/freight car (some records claim two combination passenger/freight cars, one claims two passenger cars and three freight cars.)

The Famous "Back-Up": There was no way to turn the trains around. This created the illusion of the famous "back-up." The train traveled south from Jupiter to Juno going forward. On the trip back to Jupiter, the freight/passenger car(s) seemed to be pulling the locomotive.

Two trips a day were scheduled but the little train had a reputation for being late. It was said that the train would stop for anyone waving from the bushes and there were complaints that the crew visited often with friends along the route.

The fare was high for the times: 10¢ a mile, or 75¢ for the whole trip. Passengers paid only for the distance traveled.

Old No. 3: Pictures exist of two locomotives and most accounts claim two, but at least one source claims there was never more than one (click the pictures above for larger versions). One of these pictures has been labeled in print as "Old No. 3 casting confusion on the total number of engines.

Further research has turned up a clue on the number of locomotives the short-lived railroad used. According to Donald Curl, in "Palm Beach County, An Illustrated History, the initial narrow-gauge rolling stock for the Jupiter and Lake Worth Railroad came from the St. Johns and Halifax Railroad, which had been recently converted to broad-gauge. Mr. Curl writes: "Steamboats brought a wood-burning engine ("Old No. 3"), one passenger car, and three freight cars to Jupiter. A second passenger car, purchased in 1891, and perhaps a replacement engine made up the line's entire stock." The entire description is directly quoted from Mr. Curl's book to clear up confusion caused by other sources about "Old No. 3." It came from another railroad.

Flagler Moves In: The Celestial Railroad's most profitable period was also the cause of its decline. In 1893, Henry Flagler tried to buy the line to use it to carry freight for his building of the resort of Palm Beach. Deeming the price too high, Flagler instead decided to bring his own Florida East Coast Railroad line down west of the Celestial line, eventually driving the 7 ½ mile narrow-gauge railroad into legend. In the eight months before the FEC line bypassed Juno in February 1894, the Celestial Line took in an estimated \$68,000 in freight charges for hauling materials for Flagler's railroad. By June of 1896, the Celestial rolling stock was gone on the auctioneer's block.

Most sources agree on two minor points of lore. Engineer Blus Rice (or Reis) could play Dixie on the single-toned steam whistle while his passengers sang along. He also was accompanied by a hunting dog that he would "rent out" to passengers. He would drop off people to hunt and pick them up on a return trip.