



## The Celestial Railroad

In 1885, the Town of Jupiter had to depend on the Indian River Steamboat Company to bring passengers and freight south from Titusville. When the passengers reached Juno Beach, they could board another steamer named the Lake Worth, to continue to Palm Beach or other points south. The road, however, was making the connection between Juno Beach and Jupiter. The only transportation available between these two ports was a line of freight wagons pulled by oxen, called bull trains, that shuttled their passengers and freight over the 7.5 miles of tough and rutted road. Palm Beach and Broward counties were still part of Dade County at that time with a population of 861 residents and 134 Indians. By 1889, the only sizable settlements were on Biscayne Bay and Lake Worth; however, the citizens of the Lake area soon wrested the county seat of Dade from Miami and moved it to Juno. Soon afterward, Dade County had its first two-story courthouse in Juno Beach. With Juno the new county seat, the Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company saw the opportunity to open a rail connection that would link Jupiter to Juno.

Plans for building the smallest railroad in the world, the Jupiter and Lake Worth Railroad, were announced on June 8, 1887. The narrow-gauge line was planned to run the 7.5 miles from Juno through the wilderness way

stations of Venus and Mars and finally end in the shadow of the Jupiter Lighthouse. Meanwhile, the bull trains continued to move people and freight until March of 1889 when old engine number three was moved south and delivered to Jupiter by steamboat. By late June the engine with a freight-passenger car and a flat car were decorated and prepared for the celebration and were ready to roll. Almost 100 excited residents arrived in Juno for the opening of the railroad and the free train ride to Jupiter which had been offered as part of the festive fourth of July celebration. When they arrived in Jupiter a half hour later, they were met by Captain Armour and after the picnic, visited the lighthouse and the signal station. The little railway was an instant success and soon had two full passenger coaches and three freight cars.

The southernmost railroad in the country with unusual way stations, named Venus and Mars, soon caught national attention. One writer who rode the line in 1893, dubbed it the "Celestial Railroad" and the name stuck. However, with the arrival of Henry M. Flagler to the Palm Beach area, the fate of the little railroad was about to change. Flagler, oil magnate, railroad developer, took a look at the beautiful skyline of coconut palms on Palm Beach and knew he had found what he wanted. Buying large tracts of land, he would

build the resort of Palm Beach for his friends and as a start began building the Royal Poinciana Hotel. The little railroad began hauling lumber and supplies for the hotel, but as the line increased the price for hauling, Flagler offered to buy the Celestial from the owners. However, the 1 & LW owners asked an exorbitant price for the little line and after the price gouging for hauling lumber and supplies, Flagler soon bridged the Loxahatchee River and bypassed Juno and Jupiter when he brought his railroad into West Palm Beach in March of 1894. The little railroad that always could, now could not and went into a steady decline and finally was sold at public auction in Jacksonville in June 1896. Today, all that is left of the "heavenly" railroad is a spike or two on the white sand dunes of Jupiter and Juno.