

Story Inspired by "The Loxahatchee Lament"



The Train in the Water (Wreck of Old 427)

Drivers crossing the high-arched fixed bridge on Alternate A1A in Jupiter tend to look to the east. There is a magnificent view of the Jupiter Inlet, Lighthouse, and the Atlantic Ocean. Next time you take the trip, look just to the west and down.

The Florida East Coast Railway bridge crosses the river just west of the A1A bridge. It is an interesting sight and one that has peaked my curiosity since I first saw it. The span is open only when no train is approaching or crossing.

Trains flow down the FEC tracks through Jupiter all the time at normal speed. If I were the engineer of such a train, I'd be nervous about running my train toward a potentially open bridge. Knowing that technology doesn't always work as it should, I often look down to see if there is a train in the water half expecting to see one.

Well, it did happen! On a recent research outing in the Jupiter library I stumbled on a fabulous old book called *The Loxahatchee Lament* (more about that later -- it is soon to be reprinted). Thumbing through the book, I stopped short when I saw a picture of a locomotive nose down in river. Sure enough, there was the train in the water.

I met with Carlin White on Saturday, January 29, 2000, and had a chance to talk to him about this incident. He was able to fill in some interesting little details.

My first question was "why wasn't the movie camera used, at least after the crash?" The answer is that there was a lot of commotion and filming was the last thing on his mind.

Mr. White was on the water piloting a boat, a job he did on occasion. "I think the train was called the Florida Special, which came out of New York. It was the second section of the train..." I stopped him at that point to clarify what he meant by second section (second 87.)

Carlin related this fact about trains that I never heard before: "In those day on popular routes like the Florida Special, when the train filled up and there were more passengers, they would add another train. That was called the second section. It was still the Florida Special or whatever, but there were separate trains following each other each with its own locomotive. Each section, by rule book, was supposed to be no less than 15 minutes behind the section in front of it. Engineer Turnipseed told the engineer of the first section that "I will be right on your tail!" And he was.

The three sections were heading south. The first passed safely across the closed bridge and then the bridge raised. There is a single span on the north side of the bridge that points up in the air when the bridge isn't closed. We could see the sparks as from the wheels on the rails from as far away as where Tequesta Drive is today as the engineer locked his brakes. The whole thing happened like it was in slow motion. The train couldn't have been doing more than 3 or 4 miles an hour as it hit the upturned bridge span and nosed down into the water. It was fortunate that the crash happened on the side where the span was in place because it helped to stop the train." At the inquiry, the fireman stated that "We had slowed down real good and if we had about another 150 or 200 feet we could have stopped but as it was we just kinda slud into the water."

"Was anyone hurt?" I asked.

"No, the train was going so slow at the time. The engineer replied that he been going through yellow lights all the way down the line from being close to the train sections ahead of him and had assumed that this caution light was because of the train ahead of him. By the time the red light came on to indicate the bridge was up, the brakes were already locked." One other interesting sidelight of the day's events was mentioned by Mr. White with a smile. "One of the reasons there are few pictures is that the train was loaded with wealthy men who were coming to Florida with their girlfriends. They didn't want their pictures taken. They also didn't want to wait around. They were offering to pay \$100 for a ride to The Breakers in Palm Beach. I got my car and made four trips myself that day, so I made \$400."

Florida East Coast Railway Historian Seth Bramson points out that "while some people might have been willing to pay for a ride to the Breakers, I doubt it was \$100 for same. Most importantly, the comment about 'few pictures of the train' is completely incorrect. There are numerous photos of same." Engineer Turnipseed was fired; the fireman kept his job. Corrected information for this story comes from FEC Railway Company Historian Seth H. Bramson.



Photo from FEC Railway negative, photograph by company photographer Harry M. Wolfe, both courtesy of FEC Company Historian Seth H. Bramson

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Full caption for photograph on **first page**:
Loxahatchee Lament Caption for photo "Wreck of Old 427" - One day during the 1930's, the FEC bridge had not been closed when a southbound train came upon it. This photo from Neil DuBois' album shows the result. One eye-witness was Carlin White. He said the train was heard skidding along the tracks with its brakes set for some time before the wreck. The engineer almost got the train stopped, but not quite. The engine ran into the upturned bridge span, knocked it off, and nosed down into the water behind it. Behind the coal car in this view from the west side, the first car of the train is still seen on the tracks. Later in the day Pathe News heard he had a movie camera with him -- but then White realized he had been so fascinated in watching the wreck unfold that he had not photographed it." Courier Highlights, July 4, 1974