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***Speedway to Sunshine: The Story of the Florida East Coast
Railway* by Seth H. Bramson**

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Governor Leroy Collins in 1954.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Steven F. Lawson

Speedway to Sunshine: The Story of the Florida East Coast Railway. By Seth H. Bramson. Ontario, Canada. 1984. The Boston Mills Press. Photographs. Diagrams. Appendices. Pp. 320. Cloth. \$45.00.

Seth Bramson was preparing to write this book for the last twenty-five years. A major part of his life has been devoted to gathering photographs, facts and memorabilia from the unique Florida East Coast Railway—just for the love of it. Now we all can see the tangible evidence of his personal collection and work through the pages of this well done history of the men, Henry Flagler and Edward Ball, and their railway. This is a company that was not satisfied with just playing a leading role in the development of every major city on Florida’s East Coast; in addition it pushed on across the sea by rail to Key West and thence by railway ferry all the way to Cuba.

This story begins in 1882 and extends through 1984—more than 100 years! Included are booms, busts, corporate take-overs, hurricanes and major wars. Through it all the railway continued as one of Florida’s major boosters. Seth Bramson has done a fine job of capturing the

excitement and spirit of the times with a most informative and interesting text. Sprinkled throughout the storyline are the more than 400 photographs of rare engines, cars, stations, rail passes, maps of the line, post card views of the Flagler Hotels, steamships, advertisements, timetables, and much more memorabilia carefully selected to enhance the book. Perhaps some photographers would like to know more about who took some of the pictures and under what conditions. For myself, I was glad to get to see the photographs, many never before seen in print.

In addition, an eight part appendix is included complete with rosters of all locomotives, freight and passenger equipment. An unusual feature of the appendix is the track layout of stations, sidings, mainline and mileposts from Jacksonville to Key West. This is a fascinating peek at a corporation promoting itself while promoting Florida. It provides insights into a railroad not content to be an “also ran.” The men who created the railroad were free thinkers in everything from running trains out of sight of land to breaking up unions by the use of two-man train crews working eight hours per day (while other railroads were using three to five man crews for 100 mile “days”). Everyone interested in Florida’s kaleidoscopic past will find something of value within these pages. For a “ferroequinologist,” such as myself, this book is a must!

R. Randolph Stevens