Yulee pioneered railroading in state

Hampton Dunn
YULEE PIONEERED RAILROADING IN STATE

By HAMPTON DUNN

FERNANDINA BEACH --- David Levy Yulee was a man of action, a man of vision, a man with the ability to get things done.

He's been described as "the greatest man that Florida ever produced." Yulee was a naive of the British West Indies, his father made a fortune as contractor of supplies to the Spanish Army in Cuba, acquired tremendous tracks of land, including the Arrendondo land grant near Gainesville.

Defeats didn't stop, or even slow down, Yulee. In 1851, he was defeated in his bid for reelection as U.S. Senator from Florida (he was our first Senator). But in that very same year, on June 5, he announced the selection of Fernandina as headquarters for his proposed 155 mile cross-state steam railway to Cedar Key on the Gulf coast. And he promptly went about building the line to haul cargo from ships coming into Fernandina to be transshipped from Cedar Key.

Some of the obstacles Yulee met in this challenge were mentioned in a history written by the late T. Howard Kelly, whose Grandfather Kelly was a friend and admirer of the Senator.

"In those primitive, pioneering days, the soft salt marshes, the rivers and creeks, the almost impenetrable jungles, the high ridges of central Florida, the wild animals, alligators, snakes, and the hostile Indians and the anti-railroad land owners along the route, posed almost insurmountable obstacles to forging an iron link of travel between Florida's East ark. West Coasts." But Yulee persevered and in 1861, a decade after start of the project, the first train puffed out of town.