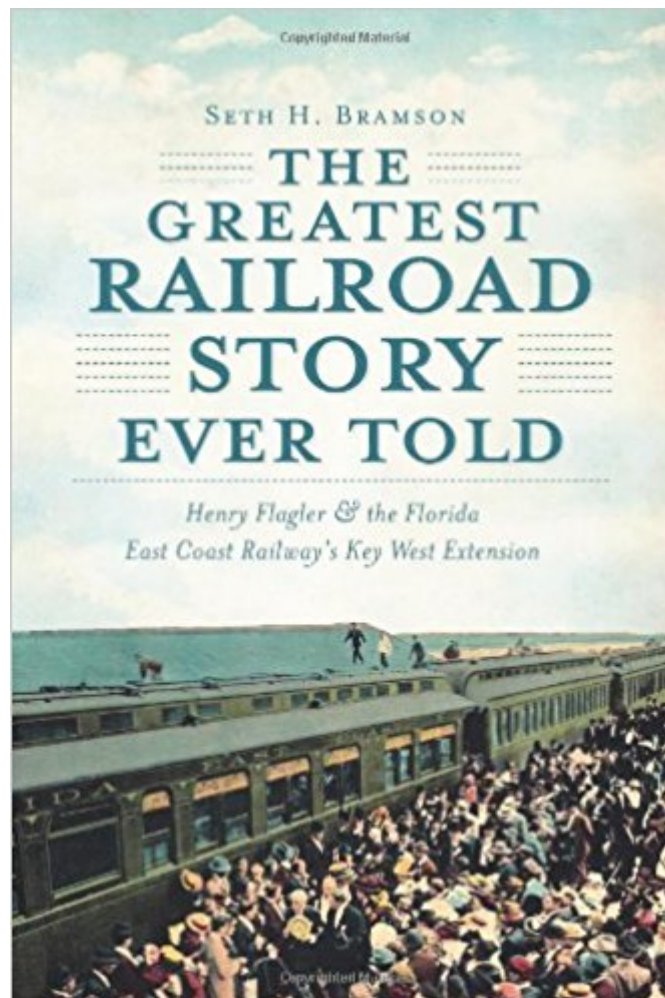




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# The Greatest Railroad Story Ever Told: Henry Flagler & The Florida East Coast Railway's Key West Extension



## Synopsis

Although several people had considered constructing a railroad to Key West beginning in the early 1800s, it took a bold industrialist with unparalleled vision to make it happen. In 1902, Henry Flagler made the decision to extend the Florida East Coast Railway to "the nearest deepwater American port." In this book, renowned Florida historian Seth H. Bramson reveals how the Key West Extension of the Flagler-owned FEC became the greatest railroad engineering and construction feat in U.S., and possibly world, history, an accomplishment that would cement Flagler's fame and legend for all time. Join Bramson as he recounts the years of operation of this great railroad, what it did for the Florida Keys and what it meant to the resident conchs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Seth Bramson is Miami's foremost local historian. He is America's single most-published Florida history book author, with sixteen of his twenty-two books dealing directly with the villages, towns, cities, counties, people and businesses of the South Florida Gold Coast. Bob Jensen retired in Homestead as a Navy Commander after serving 28 years. He served in Germany, the Philippines, the US Embassy in Cyprus, Iceland, and twice at the National Security Agency and at Naval Security Group Headquarters in Washington D.C.

I really wanted to like this book. I did. I hate giving a bad review, but I was so let down by this one that I feel I don't have a choice. Having read Les Standiford's Last Train to Paradise a few years ago, I was familiar with the story of the Florida East Coast Railway's Key West Extension and the

horrific 1935 Labor Day hurricane. I wanted to learn more about the railroad, and was hoping this book would--based upon its title alone--be an even more exhaustive telling of how the railroad came to be, its operation, and its end. Unfortunately, it still leaves many questions unanswered. The author never quite achieves a true narrative for the story. Instead, it attempts to tell the reader about the Key West Extension through what can only be called a loose series of anecdotes, facts, and eyewitness accounts. Many of these are interesting on their own, but they collectively don't tell a story. Early within the book the author informs us that there are only a handful of books that have ever authoritatively told the story of the railroad. Indeed, in the introduction, Bramson states that the detailed story of its construction and ultimate destruction is best told by a couple of other titles, but that his book will fill in missing details never before told. I immediately wondered why I didn't purchase THOSE books instead. In that same introduction and throughout the book, he disparages other writers for either getting the story wrong, or for not having researched either the FEC archives or his own personal files (the "Bramson Archive," the glories of which are extolled time and again by the author). As a reader, I don't care about what's wrong with another book or article not in my possession, and I don't care about how extensive the author's own personal collection of source material might be. I just want the story that was promised to me. Surprisingly, for a book written by someone so familiar with the FEC and so steeped in archival research, there are a lot of basics missing from the book to make it stand out as an authoritative history. There are many good photos supplied in the book--in fact, this is its greatest strength--but surprisingly few maps other than a couple of archival images that lack any detail. There is no index provided, and no footnotes given (the author cites unnamed "Internet sources" at one point). And for an author bent upon pointing out the inaccuracies of other writers' work, Bramson also makes mistakes. He cites a letter he was given that was written in February 1913 which was a response to an expression of sympathy following Henry Flagler's death--which didn't occur until May 1913. There are also a number of unanswered questions raised by the author's approach. For example, the book details why the Keys route was selected over another path through the Everglades, but why was it necessary to build a railroad to Key West in the first place? Bramson discusses the importance of the FEC emblem after the extension was built, but why is it nearly impossible to find an example of that logo in the book? The tragic death of World War I veterans in the Labor Day hurricane is mentioned, but why were there so many of them working on the railroad at that time, long after its completion? And why was the extension not rebuilt following the hurricane? I'm hopeful that, given his resources, one day Bramson will write not only the true authoritative history of the Key West Extension, but also a true "story" that is both entertaining and complete.

Tells the detailed story of the construction and operation of railroading in the Florida Keys. Pretty comprehensive with lots of detail and interesting pictures, but the narrative does not flow easily or well.

A very difficult read. Each page is littered with references to other sources or works by other authors. The continuity of a story is not there.

Great!

Very accurate information with references. It covers places where I have been without knowing they were once major railway installations.

Fantastic historical photos. Text is dry and a tough read, but contains a wealth of information.

Excellent history of a grand feat of construction and sad destruction. A great read for South Floridians of all ages.

Excellent coverage for the FEC railroad's Key West extension.

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