

FL East Coast Railway - Key West

FLORIDA  
COLLECTION

Dorothy H. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters  
FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

## The Legacy of the Indian Key Drawbridge:

---

An Examination of Federal Regulation and Private Infrastructure

Margaret K (Meg Kallman) Feeley

5/25/2009

Until recently, evidence of a drawbridge at Indian Key Channel (1907-1912) in the Florida Keys has been largely unknown in the public record. The bridge was required by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1905, and replaced with an earthen embankment by the Florida East Coast Railway in 1912. Its removal may have been a factor in the height of the storm surge in the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935. The Corps' actions related to this permitted structure were an important first exercise of its regulatory power under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, and were tested in turn by the Railway's builder, Henry M. Flagler, and associates with the Florida East Coast Railway. This case study provides data which depicts this sequence of events, and proposes to help further explicate the role of the Army Corps as an early regulator of private transportation infrastructure, and examine the nature of this relationship to issues of environmental ethics.

The Legacy of the Indian Key Drawbridge:  
An Examination of Federal Regulation  
and Private Infrastructure

By

Margaret K (Meg Kallman) Feeley

This dissertation proposal was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisor, Dr. Sandra Norman, Associate Professor Department of History, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It has been submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:**

---

Dr. Sandra Norman, Associate Professor  
Department of History  
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

---

Dr. Charles Roberts, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Chair  
Geosciences Department  
Charles E. Schmidt College of Science

---

Dr. Robin N. Fiore, Adelaide Snyder Professor of Ethics and Associate Professor  
Department of Philosophy  
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

---

Dr. Prisca Augustyn, Associate Professor  
Department of Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literature  
Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

---

Emily Stockard, Ph.D.  
Acting Director  
Ph. D. in Comparative Studies

---

Date

### Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Research Question .....	18
Study Design.....	23
Significance of the Study.....	38
Works Cited .....	45

### Introduction

This study is the story (as are all studies) of a bridge. As bridges go, this one was really very small: 90 feet overall, a railroad swing bridge, with 38 feet in the clear on either side of the concrete center pier. This drawbridge was one of three required by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in its newly-acquired regulatory role under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, and authorized in the July 15, 1905 permit issued to the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) for the construction of the 128 mile long Key West Extension, also known as the Overseas Railway.<sup>1</sup> The Corps' actions related to this permit would be an important first exercise of its regulatory power, one that would be tested in turn by the actions of the railroad's builder, Henry M. Flagler, and his associates with the Florida East Coast Railway. Until recently, the evidence of these transactions has not been available in the public discourse. This case study serves to evidence this important sequence of events, and in so doing, proposes to help further explicate the role of the Army Corps as an early regulator of

---

<sup>1</sup> At the request of the railroad, a fourth movable bridge was added to the Railway's proposed route, at Key West Harbor.