



# Trail Tales

The Newsletter of

RAILS TO TRAILS OF THE WITHLACOOCHEE, INC (RTW)

The Citizen Support Organization for the Withlacoochee State Trail

*The Friendliest Trail in the Country*

## Our Caboose!

By Dave Nichols



The caboose at the Apopka Avenue trail head of the Withlacoochee State Trail in Inverness was built in 1924 by the Magor Car Corporation, a major rail car builder of that time. The caboose, and others like it were referred to as 'woodies,' because wood was the primary product used in their construction.

The caboose was put into service in 1925 as No. 5245 in the Seaboard Air Line Railroad system. Little is known of where the caboose traveled.

Seaboard Air Line eventually merged with Atlantic Coast Line in 1967 with both becoming subsidiaries of CSX in 1980. With those mergers, early history of specific rail cars like No. 5245 has been lost. But in the first half of the twentieth century, Seaboard's primary business came from bringing northern tourists to Florida and carrying southern timber, minerals, and produce, especially Florida citrus crops, to the northern states. The main line of the Seaboard ran from Richmond, Virginia through the Carolinas, and into Georgia and Florida. Caboose No. 5245 likely traveled many of those routes during its life.

In 1995 the State of Florida bought land in Lafayette County for what was to become Troy Spring State Park. Caboose No. 5245 was found on that property without its trucks (wheel assemblies) and in a state of disrepair. No details are known as to how or when the caboose ended up there, but staff at the park were told that the previous owner of the property had the caboose put on the land so that his 'poker buddies' would have a place to stay. Park staff were unable to incorporate the car into their development plans when the park was developed in 2002, and so declared the dilapidated structure as surplus and made it available to other state park facilities for free. The caveat was the receiving facility would be obligated to pay the costs of moving.



In 2003, Rails to Trails of the Withlacoochee, Inc. (RTW), the non-profit Citizens Support Organization for the Withlacoochee State Trail, was made aware of the caboose. Trail staff and RTW volunteers visited Troy Spring and inspected the caboose. Despite its condition, they felt it



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had potential as a symbol of the rail heritage of the Withlacoochee State Trail so the RTW Board of Directors voted to pay the costs of transporting the caboose from Troy Spring to Inverness.

The caboose arrived by flatbed at the trail head on November 7, 2003, and was placed on blocks on the north side of the trail near what is now the east side of the restroom parking lot. Restoration of the caboose began soon after.

The first project was to put a new roof on the car to protect the interior and side walls from any further damage. In an effort to preserve the caboose's original appearance, volunteers then began covering the deteriorated exterior sidewalls with new siding in a more durable material. The exterior was then painted with a primer followed by a specially mixed 'caboose red' color.



The RTW determined that new signage for the caboose should represent the trail and at the same time retain its rail heritage. The logo incorporates the same circular the Seaboard Air Line emblem as logos that were painted directly sides of rail cars, the new signage on metal sheets for easy removal



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maintenance.

From the time RTW obtained the caboose, a search began to find new trucks (what most folks call wheels) that the caboose could rest on. Efforts to find an original set of leaf spring trucks were unsuccessful. Finally in late 2006, a set of trucks from a scrapped 1967 phosphate car were found at the CSX rail yard in Tampa and brought back to the State's Greenways and Trails storage yard in Inglis. In the meantime, plans were made to install a length of track and rail bed on the south side of the trail.

Two pieces of rail were donated by a local land owner. RTW purchased new pressure treated ties and volunteers laid those ties and bolted the donated rails to those ties. Finally, in June 2007, all the pieces came together. The trucks were brought in from Inglis, a crane lifted the trucks onto the rails, and finally, lifted the caboose from the north side of the trail onto the trucks at the spot where it rests today.

The caboose is now a local landmark for the Withlacoochee State Trail, visible from both the north and south approaches on the Trail, as well as from both directions on Apopka Avenue. It is a product of cooperation between government agencies and dedicated volunteers who provided countless hours of effort to make the caboose a successful addition to the community. No public funds were used for this project. All relocation and restoration expenses were paid for by RTW with revenues from the Annual Bike Ride that the RTW sponsors as a fund raising activity every October.



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### Sponsors Needed

We are working hard to fill our sponsorship needs for our 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Ride, which takes place on Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, but need your help. If you own a company, please consider a donation on its behalf. If you work for a privately-held business, please speak to someone and ask them to make a donation. If you work for a non-profit or government agency, please consider other organizations with which you interact that you might ask to help us.

Presenting Sponsors, (\$2500 or more) will receive mention on all event publicity and receive complimentary ride registrations. They also receive all benefits of all lower sponsorship levels.

Presenting and Platinum company logos will be printed on the back of the ride t-shirt (donations must be received by August 23 for inclusion on the back of the t-shirt). The logo of the largest donor at this level will be at the top of the shirt.

Platinum Sponsors, (\$1000 to \$2499) will be considered a Corporate Member of the Rails to Trails of the Withlacoochee, Inc, Citizen Support Organization; their company's name will be displayed on signs recognizing it as a Platinum (or Presenting, if appropriate) sponsor of a SAG stop. A photo of that location and the sign will appear on our web site for one year. Additionally, if the company supplies us with an advertising banner, it will be displayed on ride day at the main trail head in Inverness. Platinum Sponsors also receive all other benefits of all other lower sponsorship levels.

The names of Gold Sponsors (\$500 to \$999) will be printed on the back of the ride t-shirt (again, the donation must be received by

August 23<sup>rd</sup> to guarantee inclusion on the t-shirt). Gold Sponsors also receive all other benefits of Silver, Bronze, and Goodwill sponsorship levels.

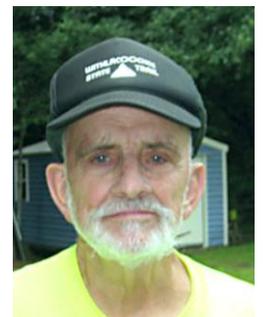
Silver Sponsors (\$250 to \$499) will receive our electronic newsletter (upon receiving your email address); a short feature about your company will appear in one issue of our electronic newsletter; you will be recognized by name in our newsletter and in local newspaper of your choice; and your company name will appear on a special display board in the registration area.

Bronze (\$150-\$249) and Goodwill Sponsors (up to \$149) company names will appear on a special display board in the registration area on the day of the ride.

Please contact Nancy Keefer at [secretary@rttwst.org](mailto:secretary@rttwst.org) for more information.

### Al Harnage

As our readers who are also regular readers of the Citrus County Chronicle may already be aware, Al Harnage, long-time advocate for the RTW, has retired from writing his regular column in that local newspaper.



However, unless you're an active member of our CSO, you might not be aware of the many other ways Al has helped us, specifically his help with the Annual Bike Ride on the Withlacoochee, and helping us gain sponsorships, and raising funds for the trail and the CSO.

Al, we all just want to say thanks for putting the trail first in so many ways!



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## Florida Artist's Gallery Update

Many cyclists have been enjoying the café at the Florida Artist's Gallery in Floral City. Unfortunately, the café is permanently closed and some changes are happening with the gallery as well. The space is being consolidated but still has many fine art pieces to choose from, offering pieces of jewelry, fiber, greeting cards and more with a bicycle theme. Stop in and check out the changes and the art work.

The gallery is open Wednesday through Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## Back by Popular Demand!



Our popular green and purple jerseys will soon be available again from our website, <https://rttwst.org/shop-rails-to-trails.php>.



The jersey was originally released in 2014, but retired in 2015 when our yellow jerseys were released. We have received enough requests to be able to bring that jersey back, and so now you can order a purple, a yellow, and a 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary jersey!

You should do that. You know you want to!

## Volunteers

Be sure to go to <https://volunteers.floridastateparks.org/> to log your hours by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month!

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