

FLORIDA'S BIG DIG *The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway from Jacksonville to Miami, 1881 to 1935.*

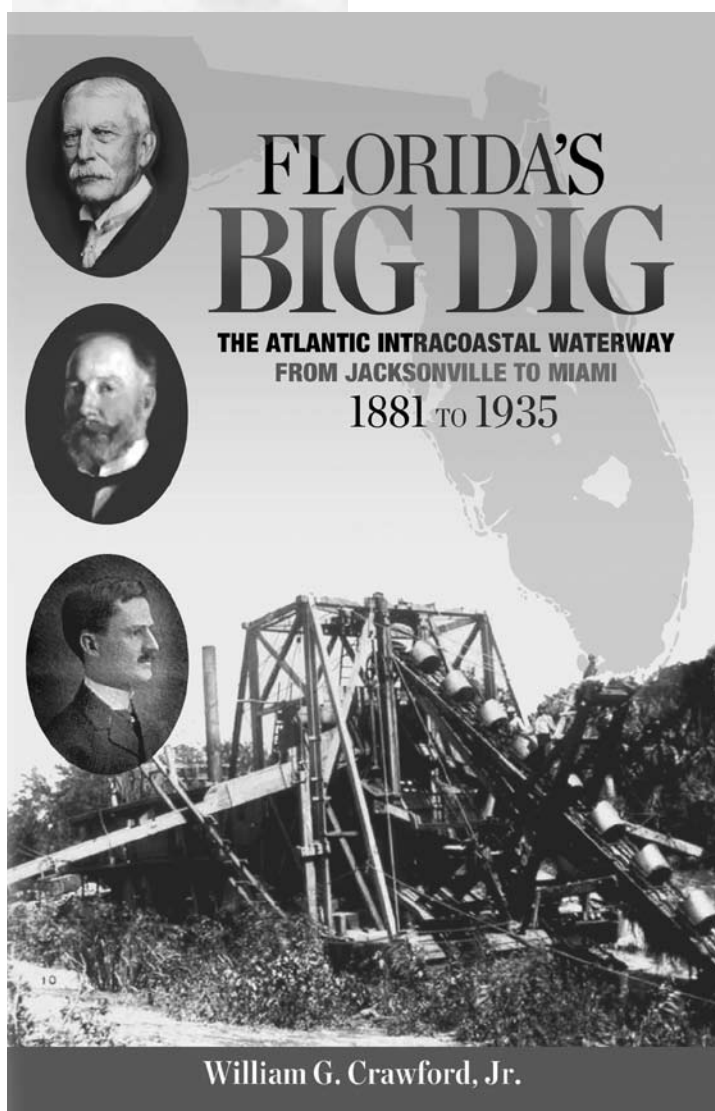
By William G. Crawford, Jr., Fort Lauderdale, Florida, 2006.
Florida Historical Society Press, 371 pages.

*Reviewed by Donald C. Gaby
Daytona Beach, Florida*

This is a remarkable book, written by a lawyer rather than an historian, and represents a monumental amount of research. It is long overdue and fills a large gap in Florida's history.

Bill Crawford provides a detailed account of the development of Florida's Intracoastal Waterway. He traces its origins from its initial recommendation by the Florida Territorial Council, through the Second Seminole War when the Army's need for improved transportation was evident, the Swamp and Overflowed Lands Act of Congress in 1850, legislative creation of Florida's Internal Improvement Fund in 1855, and on to legislative creation of the Florida Inland Navigation District in 1927.

The Congressional act gave the states millions of acres of land that could be used by them. Florida's legislation provided for the granting of such land to private investors to actually dig the waterway, and eventually for selling the waterway to the federal government. How the needed land was gradually granted and how the money was actually provided, mostly from Northeastern and Canadian individuals or companies, and how the excavations proceeded, are described in great detail. The actual project began in 1882 and was not completed until 1912. Some 268 miles of waterway were dug. Of special interest to this reviewer is that the section connecting Ormond with St. Augustine — the Halifax and Matanzas Rivers — was the most difficult and the last portion to be completed. Tolls collected from passing vessels were not adequate to repay the private investors and also to maintain the waterway. In 1929 — 47 years after the effort began — the state purchased the waterway and gave it to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to operate and maintain.



Cover design by Ana Larrauri



Barge bridge over the Florida East Coast Canal ca 1920s at Johnson Street. A. C. Mickelson Collection

This book is very informative and fills a large gap in Florida's history. Parts dealing with the many individual investors and their money might be difficult reading for some. For others they will prove fascinating. The book is highly recommended to anyone interested in how the Intracoastal Waterway came about.

Donald C. Gaby
Daytona Beach, Florida



William G. Crawford, Jr.

William G. Crawford, Jr., is past president of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society and long-time member and past-chair of the Broward County Historical Commission. His book is the winner of the 2008 Florida Historical Society Rembert Patrick Award for best book in Florida History. This is the top prize in the state. The award, named for a longtime University of Florida history professor, was presented at the Florida Historical Society's Annual Meeting awards luncheon in Sarasota on May 23, 2008.