

Jack Freed's ACL Passenger Service Career

Part 3 - 1960-1973

Interviews by Alan Freed

Part 1, in the Third Quarter 2013 issue, covered Freed's work with ACL at Washington Union Station from 1941 to 1954. Part 2, in the Fourth Quarter 2013 issue, covered his work as a traveling passenger agent in Chicago from 1955 to 1960.

Alan Freed: After Chicago, what was the next step in your career?

Jack Freed: In 1960 I was promoted to district sales manager in Sarasota,

Florida—a nice promotion. Everybody wanted to go to Florida. It was kind of nice to go down there. My office was in the passenger station—basically at the end of the line. The station housed both the passenger and freight sales representatives' offices. Down the street, about a block away, was the freight warehouse.

Alan: Where was the Seaboard station?

Jack: The Seaboard station was further

down Main Street toward the center of town, closer to U.S. Route 41, whereas the Atlantic Coast Line station was down at the far end of Main Street. Route 41 was the only route into town because they didn't have an interstate at that time. We had a really nice station built in the Spanish motif with beautifully maintained gardens in the front. The Seaboard station wasn't as nice. It was just a little old station (chuckle). Anyway, I guess they got their share of passenger business too. Their trains went the whole way down to Venice, whereas ours terminated in Sarasota.

Alan: Who else worked in the station?

Jack: Ken Howes was the district freight sales manager. He was a really nice guy and we became good friends. I believe he was the first president of the Auto Train in the 1970s. Additionally, there were two or three other people working in the ticket office.

When I was in Chicago, you were expected to work from 8:00AM to 5:00PM. Down in Sarasota it was evidently different. On my first day of work, I went out and made several sales calls and came back shortly after lunch. The secretary said to me, "What are you doing back here?" I said, "Where am I supposed to be? I still have work to do." She said, "Well, when the other fellow went out to make calls, he never came back." Anyway, she said we would get along because I had blue eyes and didn't smoke. She was a real pistol—she always was worried about people smoking because she said that smoke got into her brassiere. That was kind of a funny thing. I won't say she was nuts, but she would occasionally pick the phone up and call her house to see if she answered. All in all, she was a good secretary.

Alan: What was your territory?

Jack: My territory was north to Palmetto (right across the river from Bradenton),



Jack Freed is pictured in front of a stainless steel car and *City of Miami* car as a young passenger looks on. —Alan Freed collection



Miss Florida, Miss South Carolina, Miss Georgia, and Miss North Carolina pose on ACL President Tom Rice's business car in Jacksonville. Rice is on the left and the governor of Florida is on the right; he appears to be W. Haydon Burns, who served from 1965 to 1967. —Alan Freed collection

east to Frostproof in the middle of the state, and the whole way down south to Naples. I remember going into Naples—I think they had only one big hotel then, the Holiday Inn. Naples was still a little country town and didn't start growing until the late 1960s—and then it really started growing. At the time driving east to Frostproof or Wauchula, it was all cattle country—it wasn't developed at all. I had to report to Tampa, which wasn't the best thing in the world, but it was okay.

Alan: Did you have much interaction with the train crews?

Jack: Not too much, but we were all good friends—I liked them, they liked me. The train crews would run only from Tampa to Sarasota. They would bring the *West Coast Champion* down in the evening and back in the morning.

We lived only 10 minutes from the station, which was nice because I could hear the

engineer of the *Champion* blowing his horn at the road crossings coming into town. I could just hop in my car, drive into town, and be there just before the train rolled into the station.

Alan: What were some of the groups you organized out of Sarasota?

Jack: We brought contestants up to Atlantic City to the Miss America Contest. As I recall, we accommodated Miss Florida, Miss Georgia, Miss South Carolina, Miss North Carolina, and their families. They met Tom Rice, the president of the railroad, and the Florida governor on Mr. Rice's business car in Jacksonville. I remember that Miss Florida's first name was Sherry. The only reason I remember is because I made a welcoming sign for the station that said, "Sherry is a Berry." We handled groups like the Girl Scouts for their annual jamboree in Washington, and the Sarasota High School Marching Band and Boosters to Washington where they participated in

the Winchester, Virginia, Apple Blossom Parade. We also provided the transportation for the Chicago White Sox at the end of spring training in Sarasota.

Alan: Do you remember how much it cost per person for a group ticket from Sarasota to Washington?

Jack: For a group from Sarasota to Washington the coach fare was about \$45. That was the group ticket rate, it wasn't available for Pullman—you couldn't upgrade it.

Alan: So all in all, you enjoyed your time in Sarasota?

Jack: It was a nice year and a half stint. Evelyn and I were getting ready to buy a house—build one as a matter of fact—when I attended a sales meeting in Jacksonville, where Vice President Philip Lee told me I was going to be promoted to Washington.

Alan: How did your new promotion come about?



Miss Florida is departing Sarasota (above) on the *West Coast Champion* on the way to Atlantic City for the Miss America Pageant. Jack Freed is on the far right. Another view of Miss Florida (left) at the Sarasota station prior to departure; a *City of Miami* coach is in the background and will be added to the main section of the *City in Jacksonville*. —Both photos, Alan Freed collection

Jack: Jack Gordon, who was general passenger agent at the time in Washington, wanted to go back to Tampa. I guess they figured I was raised in Washington and had worked in Union Station, so it was the proper place for me to be. Anyway, it was a good opportunity for me and it was probably good for the Coast Line because we made a lot of things happen when I got back up here.

Alan: What was your new title at the Washington office?

Jack: I was promoted to general passenger agent. I also represented the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad.

Alan: What was your new territory?

Jack: I had Maryland and parts of Pennsylvania from Harrisburg west, including Pittsburgh. Later on we added Ohio and Detroit. I also covered Richmond. It was a good territory.

Alan: Was there an Atlantic Coast Line office in New York City?

Jack: Oh yeah, they had one in New York City. The offices in Philadelphia, Buffalo, and Boston were under the supervision of the New York City office.

Alan: Where was the office in Washington?

Jack: The office in Washington was on K Street—1721 K Street. The area was called the “Main Street” for lobbyists. The National Democratic Committee was across the street from us. The office was in the heart of the business district—right near the corner of Connecticut and K—two blocks from the White House.

Alan: How often would you go down to the station to meet the trains?

Jack: Well, as general passenger agent, I didn’t have to—my men did that. I had different people working down there.

Alan: Who were some of the passenger agents who worked for you?

Jack: Well, let’s see. Al Bellows was the depot passenger agent. Bud Drew was also the depot passenger agent for a while. Pat Reilly was district passenger agent. His territory was north of Washington, up to Pennsylvania. Bobby Dent

took my job in Chicago when I left and then he decided he didn’t like it out there so he quit. I brought him back as the district passenger agent in Baltimore. It was a good job for him.

Alan: Was the K Street ticket office generally crowded?

Jack: Business in the K Street ticket office was sporadic—a lot of people would come in at lunchtime because they were working downtown or they would call in and we’d know when they were coming—we’d have their tickets and everything ready for them. We were never what you’d call crowded because people could always buy their tickets before departure in Union Station.

Alan: Could you sell tickets on other railroads?

Jack: We’d do the whole thing. Any railroad office could sell connecting service.

Alan: Was the *Florida Special* the train that travelers preferred in the wintertime?

Jack: People who rode the *Florida Special* were loyal to it. Normally, whenever they left Florida or wherever it might be, they made their hotel reservation for the next year. So they would automatically reserve space on the *Florida Special* in advance for the period they wanted to travel.

Alan: Where was the Seaboard Office?

Jack: The Seaboard Office was a block away, a little bit further down K Street. They were in the 1600 block and we were in the 1700 block. They had a pretty nice office.

Alan: Did the two offices have much interaction?

Jack: No, I mean we knew each other. In some cases when we couldn’t get passengers on our train we might put them on a Seaboard train and vice versa. It did happen, but not a lot. We would usually try to switch them over to one of our later trains.

Alan: Could you sell a Seaboard ticket from the Atlantic Coast Line office?

Jack: No, you’d have to go down the street for a Seaboard ticket. You could only sell a Seaboard connection. The initial movement for Seaboard and Coast Line trains was over the RF&P, so both our offices could sell RF&P tickets.

Below: In ACL’s K Street office there was a large, framed photograph of the *Champion* on the main wall as you walked into the office. The wife of a friend of Jack Freed’s hand-painted the photo and, to the author’s knowledge, it was in the office for more than 20 years. After the office closed, Jack hung it over the bar in his recreation room and last year gave it to Alan to put in his office. —Harris Trusted Photo Studio, Alan Freed collection



Alan: How about group sales?

Jack: To my knowledge, before I came to DC, the Washington office never had a lot of group travel. They probably had mostly small groups on Pullman. I thought we could be successful in selling coach groups because it was becoming more and more popular for people to go to Florida in the summertime.

Alan: How did you develop group sales?

Jack: Washington had a majority black population so we started to contact inner city church groups and offer them special group rate travel to Florida. When we first began moving the church groups to Miami, they stayed in the center of the city in an area called Overtown. There was a “colored” hotel there called Sir John’s. Although the Sir John’s was famous for its nightclub, it wasn’t on the beach. At that time blacks weren’t accepted in Miami Beach hotels. Business was so slow that in the summertime many of the beach hotels were closed.

Harold Wright, the ACL assistant passenger traffic manager in Miami, and I saw an opportunity so we went to talk to several of the general managers in the Miami Beach hotels to see if we could get our groups into their hotels. At first the hotel managers were a little reluctant to do it—one

said he was afraid he’d have a couple of cement blocks put on his legs and be dropped into the bay. But he decided to give it a try anyway—and boy were we successful! The next thing you know we were handling a lot of black groups out of Washington. It worked out well for everybody.

Alan: So you were you one of the first companies to integrate Miami Beach?

Jack: For sure. When we were able to offer hotels on the beach to various churches and individuals around town, railroad groups to Florida took off like gangbusters. We had groups going down every week—one group arriving on the train would meet the other group coming back, and so on. We put groups in the Barcelona, the Seville, the Atlantic Towers, the Seagull, and the Di Lido hotels. We never went back to Sir John’s.

The hotels were very, very cooperative with us. We ended up with summer package tours that gave us hotel rooms for \$9.50 a day—with breakfast and dinner! Then we thought, well we’re already in Miami Beach, let’s offer something more.

Alan: So, then you started cruises to the Caribbean?

Jack: I first started the trips into the Caribbean with a local representative of the British West Indies Airlines. We would

take the groups into Miami on the train, transfer them to a DC3 airplane, and they would fly to Jamaica. Jamaica was the first place we went, and people went for that like gangbusters again.

There wasn’t a whole lot of cruise traffic in Miami in the late 1950s, and the Atlantic Coast Line and Florida East Coast did own, as I mentioned before, a steamship operation from Miami to Havana. The ship was called the *SS Florida*. My first affiliation with the operation of the ship to Havana was when I was traveling passenger agent in Chicago. But then when Castro took over, we ceased the operation to Cuba.

So, what to do with the ship? Well, the ship was based in Miami and had a mail contract to move mail from Miami to the Bahamas. So we started out offering overnight cruises to Nassau and Freeport. It was only 118 miles from Miami—that’s not far. The cruises were scheduled twice a week. The ship departed on Friday and Monday nights. We used the *SS Florida* at first, and then switched to the *Bahama Star* and the *Yarmouth Castle*. The *Yarmouth Castle* caught fire during the night on the way to Nassau and sank on November 13, 1965. There were over 500 people on board and 90 people died. I had a group on the ship three weeks before it sank.

Alan: Any memorable trips?

Jack: I had a large inner city Baptist Church group from Washington and we were returning on the *SS Florida* to Miami to make connections with the *Champion* that morning. I think we were due to arrive about 7:00AM. The train was scheduled to depart Miami about 9:30-10:00AM. When I woke up and looked out the porthole there was no land in sight. According to the time, we should have been just about ready to dock.

Because I had taken so many groups on the *Yarmouth Castle*, I got to know and became good friends with the captain—a Greek fellow. So I went up to the captain’s bridge to find out what was going on. I’ll never forget, he said, “The ship’s no good and the captain’s a son of a bitch.” He then told me there had been a terrific storm last night and we nearly capsized. I must have slept through it!

Anyway, I asked if I could get a call into the port to contact the railroad, so the captain sent me upstairs to the wireless room. And I find, because of the storm, the wireless is not working! So we finally got into the port, and it was really close to the



This publicity photo depicts the Sir John’s Hotel in Miami, famous during the 1950s and early 1960s for its nightclub. —Alan Freed collection

time the *Champion* was leaving. We had to go through Customs and so it was really touch and go there for a while. But we had made arrangements for my group to get off first. Well, this didn't go over too well with the rest of passengers. They wanted the same privilege as we had. They didn't know that we had to catch a train.

Harry Wright was down at the dock to meet us, with buses waiting to take us to the station. So, I remember, we got the passengers loaded on the buses and we made it over to the station as fast as we could. They held the train for us and we probably left about a half-hour late, maybe a little longer. That wasn't too bad—we could make up the time. But I'll never forget the captain.

Alan: Didn't you organize the *Lady Bird Special*?

Jack: Yeah, we were asked by the White House transportation office to put together a special whistle-stop tour for the President's wife, Lady Bird Johnson, to bolster President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 election campaign. Lady Bird would be stumping for her husband in the southern states. The train was to start at Union Station in Washington. I worked with the transportation office at the White House. We put together an all-Pullman train. The *Special* also had lounge cars, diners, and roomettes for the newspaper reporters. The reporters had to buy their own tickets. The presidents of the participating railroads also put their business cars on the train for Mrs. Johnson's party.

Alan: Was it an interesting trip?

Jack: It was an interesting operation. The town mayors would board the train at the previous stop so they could be seen on the back platform with Lady Bird Johnson when we rolled into their town. We traveled over the RF&P, Norfolk & Western, Atlantic Coast Line, Southern Railroad, and the Seaboard down into Tallahassee and then over to New Orleans on the Louisville & Nashville. When we arrived in New Orleans we weren't sure whether or not they wanted the train to go on through to Dallas, but they elected to stop it in New Orleans.

Alan: Do you have any special memories of the trip?

Jack: One of the interesting things that happened was when we pulled into Rocky Mount. I got off the train with the vice president of public relations, Don Martin, and the road foreman of engines, Jake Jones. Jones rode in the cab of the engine on the Atlantic Coast Line portion of the



Jack Freed stands beside a drawing (above) given to him during his work with the *Lady Bird Special*. Another memento of the *Lady Bird Special* was this lapel pin (right). —Alan Freed photos



trip. We were standing on the platform and who should get off the train and come over to us but Lady Bird's personal secretary, Liz Carpenter. Don Martin made the mistake of asking her, "Is everything okay?" She said, "Everything's okay, except that Lady Bird said the chili's not hot enough." Don said, "Well, Jack can take care of that." I went into the dining car, talked to the cook, who was legendary for his red-hot chili, and told him that Lady Bird wanted her chili hotter. He said, "Don't worry, Jack, I'll take care of it."

When Liz Carpenter and Lady Bird came into the dining car and sat down for lunch, Don and I happened to be sitting across the aisle from them. After Liz Carpenter took her first bite of the chili, I thought her eyeballs were going to pop out. After Liz finally caught her breath, she turned to me and said it was just right. What else could she say?

When we pulled into Charleston, the state police picked up Ed Martin, the RF&P passenger traffic manager—nice guy—and me to drive us to a downtown hotel so we could freshen up. En route to the hotel, the policeman got a call that there was a murder and so he took off like a jackrabbit

and there we were sitting in the back seat riding along with them.

I remember, when I got back to Washington, I got a call one night about quarter of five. It was some newspaper reporter wanting to know if Lady Bird Johnson paid her bill to the Coast Line. Well, I didn't give them any answer even though I knew they hadn't paid. I called the White House and got a hold of Liz Carpenter and told her what happened and she said, "Don't leave the office until I call you back." I said, "Okay." So she called back and she said, "A check will be over across the street for you in about 15 minutes." I think our railroad was the only one that got paid.

Alan: Did you enjoy riding on the special trains?

Jack: Oh, yeah. Everyone was nice. They knew what they were on there for—they anticipated their arrival and had fun getting there. They were either reading, playing cards, drinking or whatever—just

an opportunity to have fun and get away.

I remember we operated a special train every year for an all-male group from the Burning Tree Country Club in Potomac, Maryland. John Smith, who was the chairman of the board of the Seaboard Coast Line after the merger, set it up. A congressman from Leesburg, Florida, invited them—I think his name was Hurley. They went down on a special, all-Pullman train to his club and they played for several days. Many of the top lobbyists, congressmen, and individuals from big companies came along. It was a fun trip.

Alan: The Coast Line maintained a fishing camp down in Florida, didn't they?

Jack: Yes, as I remember it was near Palatka, a very nice, rustic place. I remember taking a group of people down on the vice president's, Mr. Lee's, business car. It was just refurbished; it was real, real nice. Some of us were able to sleep in the bedrooms in the business car and others had Pullman accommodations somewhere else in the train. At the camp we'd have a nice breakfast, then pack a lunch and go out for the day with a guide fishing, two people in each boat. Then we would come back and have dinner, and afterwards relax, have a few drinks and play cards.

Alan: Were you involved in any special projects while you were in the Washington office?

Jack: A friend of mine, Charlie Van Horn, who was with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and well-known on Capitol Hill,

asked me if I would assist him in handling the transportation for the "Honor America Day," which was to be held on the Fourth of July. Willard Marriott, Billy Graham and Bob Hope were sponsors of the program and they had access to the White House pretty much as they wanted it. I worked with the Hollywood producer who was in charge of putting the program together—music and so on. Bob Hope and Billy Graham sent me nice thank-you letters.

Alan: Did you always suspect there'd eventually be a merger between the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard?

Jack: No, I never really thought much about it. But I guess it was inevitable. Everybody's interested in one thing and that's the bottom line. And, of course, the merger might not have happened if the Florida East Coast hadn't gone on strike.

Alan: While you were in Washington, the Pullman era was coming to a close.

Jack: By the end of the Pullman era, fortunately, most of the Pullman conductors and porters were ready to retire anyway. They'd been on the road for a long time.

Alan: Talk about your memories of the Pullman porters.

Jack: Most all the porters were highly selected. The Pullman porters enjoyed their work and enjoyed having the job. They made pretty good pay and got good meals. I'm pretty sure they got good tips as well. By and large, people who worked on the railroad worked together and got along well.

Alan: How were the porters and dining car waiters treated?

Jack: I never saw Pullman conductors or the passengers mistreat any of the porters. The dining car waiters would occasionally be blamed for certain things that weren't their fault—they were just the bearers of the goods. Anyway, I've never seen anyone, porter or waiter, mistreated on the trains, never did. Our waiters and the Pullman porters were all first class. These were people who had been around a long time. They took care of the passengers and the passengers respected them.

Alan: As I recall, everyone pretty much knew each other by name?

Jack: Probably, and if they didn't, they had their name tags. When I was traveling on the *Florida Special*, a lot of us had the same working schedule. Usually three days on and two days off, so we really got to know each other.

Alan: When did you find time to eat on the train?

Jack: You never ate at the regular times. I would usually eat between station stops. Lunch was generally between Wilmington and Baltimore, and dinner sometime after 8:00PM, usually between Fayetteville and Florence. It would just depend where the train was running at a particular time.

All members of the crew ate the same food—we all ate well. A lot of times the chef would cut the tips off the steaks served to passengers during the day and fry them up for us late at night.

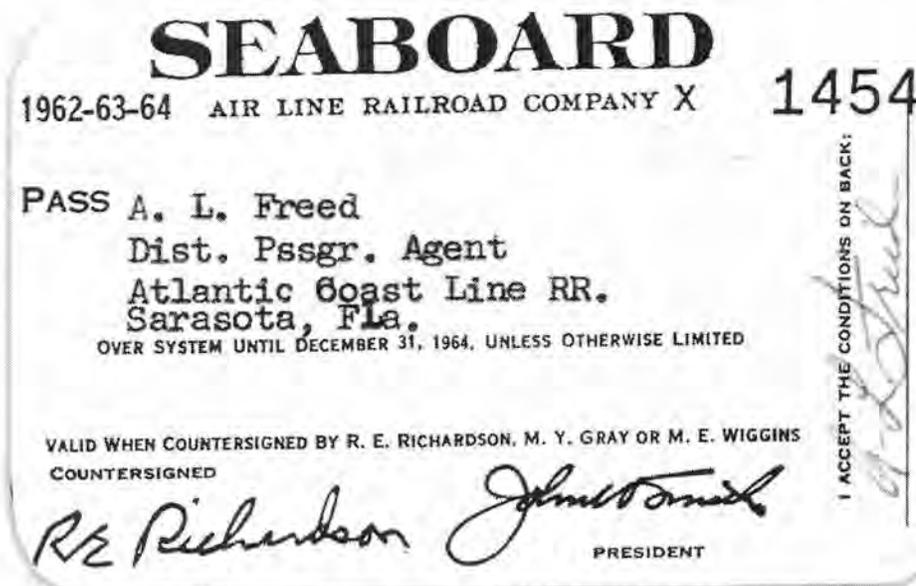
Late in the evening, after the passengers were served and had retired for the evening, the waiters would often play poker in the dining car. It was kind of interesting to watch and see how they played. They did a lot of bluffing and it seemed to me that they played a bit recklessly, maybe because they were playing with their tip money. I occasionally joined them, which was a big mistake—I never won, but it was a good education.

Alan: So what did you think when you heard that Amtrak was going to take over Seaboard Coast Line's passenger service?

Jack: I really didn't give it a lot of thought. I knew I had to work and I felt in the end I would probably stay with the Seaboard Coast Line.

Alan: So what happened?

Jack: I got a joint phone call from Horace Emerson, who was vice president of freight, and Jim Bozard, who was vice president of passenger service. They wanted to know if



This pass was issued to Jack Freed by ACL's rival, the Seaboard, during his time as district passenger agent at Sarasota. —Alan Freed collection



ACL E6 514 has Train 192, the northbound *West Coast Champion*, ready to leave Sarasota, Florida, in March 1965. The Coast Line's classic mission-style station is in the background. Jack Freed served the Sarasota territory in the 1960s. —*Emery J. Gulash photo, Joseph L. Oates collection*

I would take over the freight department in Washington. Being facetious, I told them, “I don’t know much about freight. There are only two things I know about freight—there’s a diesel in the front and a caboose in the rear.” (chuckle) Mr. Emerson said, “We don’t care what you know about freight. We’ll teach you that. We’re just care about what you know about Washington.” And that’s the reason they hired me in the freight department.

Alan: At the time, did you think Amtrak would be successful?

Jack: I never gave it much thought because, especially as far as the Coast Line was concerned, Amtrak was taking over a first-rate operation. Private passenger service was never given the same flexibility and backing that the government gave Amtrak. It certainly wasn’t a level playing field. There is no doubt in my mind that if private

railroads had been given similar tax and regulatory advantages, they would still be in operation—offering a better quality of service than Amtrak offers today (my thought).

Alan: Dad, I’ve really enjoyed doing these interviews with you. Do you have any final thoughts on your railroad career?

Jack: I had an excellent career. Back then, most of the people who worked for the railroad stayed with it. I’ve always believed that if you have to work, it’s best that you enjoy it. If the Seaboard Coast Line had stayed in the passenger business, I probably would have kept working. When it was my time to retire, I felt that I still had a lot to offer.

Railroads were historically a family affair—an interesting place to work where you met so many nice people. My career was never boring as there was something different every day. If someone worked for the railroad back then, you pretty much knew

that’s where they wanted to be.

It’s hard to say whether or not the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and later the Seaboard Coast Line were better than the other railroads, but there’s no doubt that the Coast Line was an exceptional railroad. Management put money back into the railroad to make it what it was—a first class operation, operating first class passenger trains, with first class people. If you did your job well, they recognized you. I wouldn’t have wanted to work anywhere else.

After leaving the Seaboard Coast Line passenger department in 1973, Jack became the manager of Washington sales in the freight department from 1973 until 1983. From 1984 to 1992 he was assistant vice president of sales at Fruit Growers Express. Jack can be reached via email at jack@alanlfreedassociates.com. 📧