274# Historic Depot Building (Script by Peggy Macdonald)

Can you hear the train coming? Gainesville would not exist without the railroad, which is why the City chose to restore this historic building. In 1853, Alachua County decided to move the county seat from Newnansville to a new town that would be established near David Levy Yulee’s proposed railroad, which would become the first cross-state railroad in Florida. The new town was named Gainesville after General Edmund P. Gaines, a Seminole War hero. By the 1880s, three main railroads serviced Gainesville. Until 1948, trains ran right down Main Street.

The Old Gainesville Depot, also known as the Seaboard Air Line Depot, is even older than was first thought at the time it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1996. About a decade later, it was discovered that the former train station dates to 1860 and was the site of a Civil War skirmish. Historic maps revealed the true age of the depot. The maps also showed the creation of a separate waiting room for African Americans following the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision in 1896 that legalized segregation and established the “separate but equal” doctrine.

According to a historic survey Bender and Associates Architects completed before the Depot Park rehabilitation, the Old Gainesville Depot was involved in the “brief but bloody” Battle of Gainesville on August 17, 1864, when Union troops occupied the building and took a defensive position along the railroad tracks. Due to the Confederate victory, the depot was not damaged. In 2009, the 10,000-square-foot train depot was cut into sections and moved to the east side of Depot Park so the contaminated soil under the building could be cleaned. The depot was later returned to its original spot by the site of Yulee’s cross-state railroad. Today the depot plays an important role in connecting locals and visitors to Gainesville’s Civil War history.