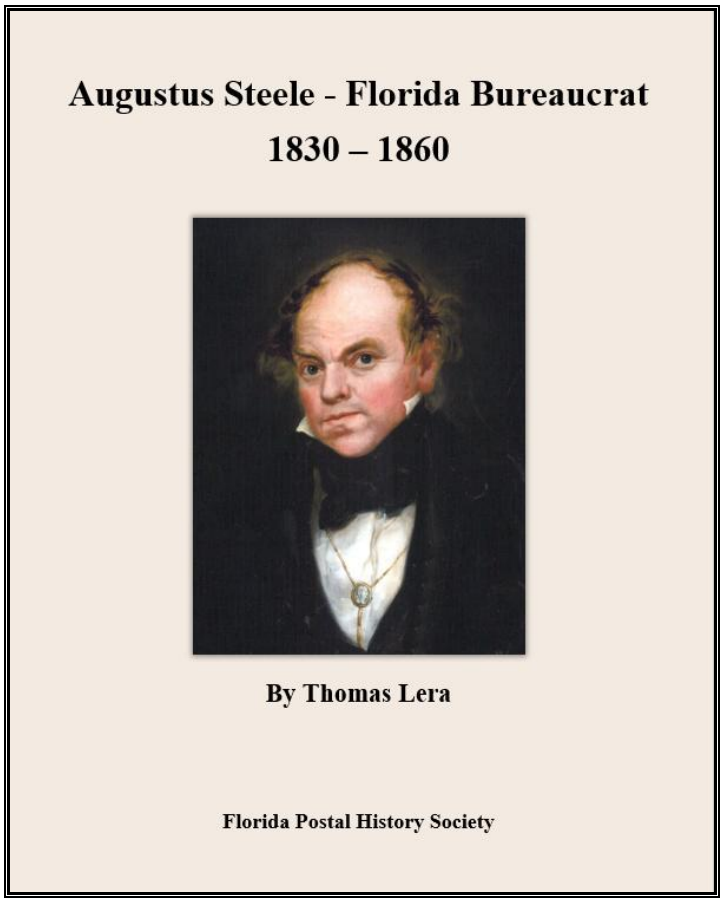
Announcing a New Monograph
Augustus Steele – Florida Bureaucrat 1830-1860
By Thomas Lera

It is with great pleasure that the Florida Postal History Society offers Thomas Lera's second monograph to its membership and other collectors. This excellent undertaking will enhance your knowledge of Augustus Steele's activities in Hillsborough County including Tampa Bay, Tampa, and Levy County, including Depot Key, Atsena Otie, and Cedar Key.



<u>Ordering Information</u>
Thomas Lera
8714 Alegre Circle
Orlando, FL 32836
tlera4178@gmail.com

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

This paper is about Augustus Steele (June 4, 1792 – October 25, 1864). A Florida bureaucrat, Steele came to Florida in 1825 and helped establish the town of Magnolia, eight miles north of St. Marks. He became the editor and publisher of *The Magnolia Advertiser,* founded December 12, 1828, then sold his interest in the paper to his partner Thomas Hayden March 27, 1830.

His wide social and political network was a result of his newspaper business. In 1830 Jesse Willis, Collector of Revenue for the St. Marks District, recommended him to be appointed as Surveyor of Customs. Since the District extended from St. Marks / Magnolia to the northern portion of Charlotte Bay Florida, several new locations were established as ports of entry. One of these was Tampa Bay where Steele was appointed Deputy Revenue Collector.

When he arrived in Tampa, he published *The Gouger,* a lampoon newspaper which was short lived, but allowed him to continue to expand his political networks. He later became Inspector of Customs, Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, Election Inspector, Commissioner to Protect the Fisheries of Tampa Bay, and Postmaster of Tampa Bay (later Tampa).

Steele was instrumental in the official formation of Hillsborough County, with Tampa as the County Seat, from portions of Alachua and Monroe Counties January 25, 1834, the same day he became Judge of the Hillsborough County Court. He also dabbled in real estate, but this is another long story which will not be discussed in this paper.

Between 1840 and 1842 he served in the Legislative Council (House of Representatives) of the Territory of Florida for Hillsborough County.

Under the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, Steele applied in 1843 for 169 acres of the area that was Depot Key which he renamed Atsena Otie Key. He became the Customs Inspector of Cedar Key and Postmaster of Atsena Otie and Cedar Key.

Biennial Sessions began in the Florida State Legislature in 1850, and Augustus was elected as Levy County Assemblyman. This position allowed him to lobby for David Yulee's cross-state railroad, one of the first in Florida, which began in Fernandina and terminated in Cedar Key.

This article follows his Hillsborough County activities including those in Tampa Bay and Tampa, then discusses his Levy County activities including those in the Second Seminole War, Depot Key, Atsena Otie, and Cedar Key. I will highlight some of his other important accomplishments with David Yulee and the Florida Railroad, and the Florida Territorial and State Legislatures.