

SOUTHERN PACIFIC NEWSLETTER
Edited by Bill Fowler
January 2025



I have been researching the history of the Southern Pacific System from 1850 to 1996 for a series of articles to be published in the Southern Pacific Railroad History Center's quarterly publication, *The Southern Pacific Experience*.

During my ongoing research, I have consulted scores of books, other publications, and unpublished documents, all of which have confirmed that Southern Pacific was the best integrated transportation system that has ever existed in the United States. The Southern Pacific System was vast and complex to administer. The goal, of course, was to operate trains efficiently and on schedule.

We should be proud of our Southern Pacific careers. I was very fortunate to have traveled throughout the Southern Pacific System for many years. During those journeys, I met employees from all walks of life, and almost every person had their favorite stories about Southern Pacific.

The history of the Southern Pacific has been told thousands of times in various ways. My intent is to present the Southern Pacific story in a different manner — as a corporate history, showing how the entire system was developed with text, rare maps, charts, photos, and more. As might be expected, I have discovered a few surprises and some misinformation.

The plan is to start with development of Southern Pacific's railroad system, including interurban and street car operations, and then

to cover other aspects of the elements system such as trucking, buses, ferries, pipelines and more.

The articles will show how the system grew over the years and then, beginning in about the 1920s, Southern Pacific began its period of spinning off certain assets, particularly its railroad companies, and selected outcomes will be provided. However, even while this was taking place, Southern Pacific grew very selectively, and events that will be highlighted include acquisition of the Cotton Belt during the 1930s and Southern Pacific's access to Chicago in 1989.

In addition, other subjects that will be covered include land grants and the creation and acquisition of various ancillary businesses such as Sunset Magazine, Southern Pacific Communications Company (SPRINT), and Ticor.

I have written the story in such a way that it is quite readable, but ample endnotes are included to supplement the text with additional information, and in many instances, links to online articles are provided.

Finally, these articles will only be accessible through a Southern Pacific Railroad History Center membership, <https://splives.org/join/>. The initial story is scheduled for publication on March 1, 2025.



**Henry Richard "Bill" Gastelum
July 18, 1940 ~ November 23,
2024**

Bill Gastelum passed peacefully at his home surrounded by family on November 23, 2024. At the time of his death, he was living in Sacramento where he had spent most of his life, including a long career as an electrician with the Southern Pacific where he developed many lifelong friendships.

Bill was preceded in death by his parents, Henry and Cecelia Gastelum, sister Joyce Gastelum Yates, son Mark Gastelum and his wife of nearly 40-years, Patricia "Pat" King Gastelum. He is survived by his brother Duane Gastelum, wife Laura and family; daughter Kim Gastelum Taber and husband Andy; son Henry, Jr; son Timothy d'Arcy and wife Shelley; two grandsons; a granddaughter; two great grandsons; and great granddaughter.

Bill was born in Tucson, Arizona, but primarily grew up in Sacramento where he attended Hiram Johnson High School. One of his greatest joys as a young parent, raising a daughter and two sons, was taking many day trip adventures by car all around northern California, sometimes camping out. One of his joys in general, especially during leisure time and in retirement, was travelling with Pat and his many RV friends which became his RV family, often gathering on the coast or at Baxter, including an extended stay in Yuma, Arizona for five years. Bill would have a good conversation with anyone he met and collected friends wherever he went.

Bill was a person of quiet faith, high character and well known for his unswerving commitment to family and friends. He will be missed by all who had the good fortune to know him.

Editor's request: When changing email addresses, please send your new address to billfowler@southernpacificjourney.org.

I wish to recognize our correspondents for 2024. They are Bill Neill, Bob Paulson, Dick Sweet, Edith Foothorap, Jeff Root, Jon Hurst, Joseph Moreaux, Larry Huffman, Mike Dickerson, Paul Gotthardt, Pete Baumhefner, Roger Staub, Virginia Rodriguez, and William Thibodeaux. Thanks to each of you for your contributions!

**James Carl Mahon
September 21, 1937 ~ December 9, 2024**

James Carl Mahon (The Bear) passed away in Roseville, California on December 9, 2024. He was 87 years old.

Jim was born on September 21, 1937, to Walter G. Mahon and Marguerite Castro in Bakersfield, California. He went to work for Southern Pacific at the age of 15 by lying about his actual date of birth. He was married to Nancy Mahon, mother of Vance and Diane. After his divorce, he married Nola Overdiek. She brought two children, Chuck and Cindy to the marriage.

Jim's first love was the Southern Pacific. He also enjoyed fishing and hunting. He worked for Southern Pacific and Union Pacific for 40 years. After being hired by Southern Pacific, he was assigned as a track laborer, and later was appointed an assistant division engineer.

He was known for the successful efforts in the rebuilding of the Great Salt Lake causeway in the mid-1980s after storms and high water runoffs from mountains forced major damage to the structure. It is a tribute to his leadership the causeway was returned to service in advance of projected timelines. This enabled the return of Southern Pacific's Overland Route for regular operations. Jim is also remembered for his management of snow removal from Southern Pacific's trackage and right of way in the central Sierra Nevada including Donner Pass. A video of his snow removal skills was highlighted in a video

named "The Battle for Donner Pass." He was known to officers and employees of Southern Pacific as "The Bear." Jim was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Walter and Marguerite Mahon, and siblings Walter, Evelyn, Richard, Vincent, and daughter, Rebecca (Boo Bear). Jim is survived by his wife, Nola, and siblings Barbara, Gary (Joy), Larry (Sandy), and Eugene. Survived by his children, Vance and Diane; stepchildren, Chuck and Cindy; five grandchildren; and thirteen great grandchildren.



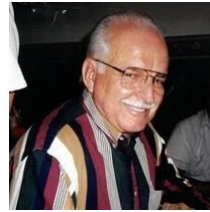
James Edward (Jim) Jordan
December 14, 1944 ~
December 16, 2024

Jim passed away at his home in Eugene, Oregon on December 16, 2024. He had struggled with cancer and lung problems for many years.

Jim was born in La Grand, Oregon on December 14, 1944, and moved to Eugene with his parents when he was a young child.

Jim worked for Southern Pacific/Union Pacific for 42 years. He retired as a machinist and then spent many years traveling with his wife, Dorothy, and cat, Buffett.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Dale and Bernice; son, Troy Jordan; and grandson, Michael Jordan. He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; brother, Dave Jordan of Portland, Oregon; daughter, Tana Jordan of Prineville, Oregon; sons, Scott Jordan of Eugene, and Robert Dahlke (Stephanie) of La Vernia, Texas; eight grandchildren; and four great grandchildren.



Johnny Franklin Gros
January 11, 1937 ~
November 25, 2024

He passed away on November 25, 2024, at his home in Labadieville, Louisiana.

Johnny served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean Conflict. He retired as a conductor for Southern Pacific after 40 years of service. He enjoyed camping, boiling crawfish, and spending time with family.

Mr. Gros, a resident of Duson, was the son of the late Camille C. Gros and the former Hazel Schwab.

He is survived by his wife of 36 years, Anne; son, Troy Gros; granddaughter, Kristen; and grandson, Trent.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother, Gaston; and sister, Betty.