

SOUTHERN PACIFIC NEWSLETTER
Edited by Bill Fowler
December 2023



Hopefully, on Tuesday, December 12, 2023, the History Center's new website (<https://www.splives.org/>) will be available for viewing. As this website is expanded, more than 100 pages about Southern Pacific will be available for viewing.

As many of you know, as president of the Southern Pacific Railroad History Center, I am very involved in memorializing as much Southern Pacific history as possible. During 2024, an online archive will be created and content will be uploaded for viewing by visitors interested in Southern Pacific.

To help us to very successful in this endeavor, I ask for your support in two ways so that we can publish as much material as possible on the History Center's website <https://www.splives.org/> and the online archive during 2024 and beyond.

First, you can become a member of the History Center by clicking on the following link: <https://www.splives.org/join>. Or if you wish to merely donate to the History Center, please click on the following link: <https://www.splives.org/donate>.

You can also donate your Southern Pacific related items to the History Center. If you wish to do this, please send an email to me at wefowler@pm.me with information about your collection I will respond promptly.



Richard Wilson Blair
April 24, 1937 ~ October 26, 2023

Richard Wilson Blair passed away October 26, 2023, in Elko, Nevada. He was born in Ogden, Utah April 24, 1937, to his parents Walter Schofield Blair and Weltha May Wilson.

He was raised and attended school in Wells, Nevada, where he met the love of his life, Patricia Lee Gerber. Rich and Pat were married June 27, 1959, in Starr Valley, Nevada. They subsequently moved to Ogden, Utah where Richard went to work for Southern Pacific as a pipefitter, and over time, as an electrician journeyman, carman helper, maintenance of way electrician, and locomotive electrician.

His children and grandchildren were always thrilled when he would take them to see the equipment he worked on, where they had the opportunity to "drive a train." Rich and Pat raised five children and were married 41 years until her death in 2000.

Richard was hard working, humble, kind, and loved his friends and family. He was never a social person, but loved going camping, and would attend his children's and grandchildren's special events. He loved music, and enjoyed attending local concerts. He enjoyed taking his family on car trips (he hated to fly), where they made special memories together.

The best thing about Dad, Grandpa, and “GGP” was his sense of humor. Everyone had a special joke or phrase they shared with him.

Richard was preceded in death by his parents Walter and Weltha; his wife Patricia; his sisters Marian Earl and Ruth West his infant brother Walt; and his son Steven. He is survived by his daughters Janet (Kemper) Huber, Karen Blair, Rebecca Sharp, and Linda Blair. He is also survived by his seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

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



Charles Francis (Frankie) Golden
January 1, 1947 ~ October 24, 2023

Charles Francis (Frankie) Golden, age 76, passed away on October 24, 2023, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Frankie was born on January 1, 1947, at West Point, Mississippi, and was the son of Charles Henry and Juanita Welch Golden. He was a 1965 graduate of Grady High School and attended the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

After a brief employment at International Paper Company, Frankie was employed by the Cotton Belt in Pine Bluff, and he retired as a locomotive engineer with more than 25 years of service.

He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and music; especially when he was younger, singing and entertaining with his friends in the Boogie Train Band. Frankie was blessed with many friends and never met a stranger.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by three sisters, Faye Bailey McKell, Judy

Kay Shurden Oswald, Wanda June Golden; and a brother, Major Eugene Golden.

He is survived by his son Jordan Ryan Golden.



James L. Bratton
July 12, 1922 ~ October 14, 2023

On October 14, 2023, after 101 years of life, James Leroy (Jim) Bratton, left to explore the hunting and fishing grounds of heaven.

Jim was born in Gerber, California to Martin Luther Bratton (Luke) and Ursel Cate Bratton. Jim attended schools in Gerber, Weed, California and Klamath Falls, Oregon, graduating from Klamath Union High School in 1940. He attended Sacramento State College [now University] for a brief time but returned to Klamath Falls to join the United States Navy. James honorably served on the U.S.S. Franklin, an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific during WWII as an aviation machinist mate first class. He survived the October 30, 1944 kamikaze attack on the Franklin and flew combat missions as a rear gunner.

Jim married Bernice Larson in Norman, Oklahoma on December 19, 1942. They were married 67 years before Bernice's passing in 2010. Together they raised their three girls Julie, Patty, and Sally in Klamath Falls where Jim worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad's yard office. He hunted, fished, and volunteered at the Suburban Fire Department where he was named fireman of the year. Jim was a lifelong member of the Klamath Falls Masonic Lodge. He watched his girls graduate from Klamath Union High School, leave home for college, and "walked them down the aisle."

As empty nesters he and Bernice moved to San Jose as Jim accepted a job in Southern Pacific general office building in San Francisco. In 1982 after a forty-year career with Southern Pacific, he retired and he and Bernice traveled throughout the United States and internationally. In 1997, they moved to Ashland, Oregon.

Bernice passed in 2010, and Jim continued to live life to its fullest. He loved celebrations, and had birthday parties at 90, 95, 100, and 101 with his family, friends, and neighbors

Jim is survived by his three daughters; Julie (Troy) Reynolds, Talent, Oregon, Patricia McMahan, Bend, Oregon, and Sally (Sandor) Vincze, Reno, Nevada; seven grandchildren; eight great grandchildren; five great-great grandchildren; and many beloved nieces, nephews and cousins throughout the United States.

Jim was preceded in death by his parents, a sister Lorraine and great grandson Max Vincze.

Do you have a story about your Southern Pacific career that you wish to share with others? If so, please submit your outline to Bill Fowler at billfowler@southernpacificjourney.org.

**Warren Robert "Bob" Benton
November 26, 1938 ~ November 25, 2023**

Warren Robert "Bob" Benton was born November 26, 1938, in Danville, Virginia, to James Warren "Jim" and Lena Mills Benton. The family later moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and he graduated from Pine Bluff High School in 1957. Bob then attended Ole Miss on a basketball scholarship. He left college early to serve in the United States Air Force. After Bob was discharged, he returned to Pine Bluff where he was employed by the Cotton Belt, retiring after thirty years of service as a locomotive engineer.

Bob loved coaching sports, especially Pee Wee and Little League baseball, and was a high school football coach for a short period of time. His spare time was often spent landscaping and growing the most beautiful Azaleas, crappie fishing, or traveling nationwide to various horse races. He also loved ministering to people and sharing the love of Jesus.

He was preceded in death by his parents; a daughter, Leigh Ann Benton; and his twin brother, James Mills "Bodie" Benton.

Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Janet Moran Benton; his sons, Bradley Benton and wife, Steffany, Steve Benton and wife, Cristy, and Jeff Benton and wife, Shelley; two brothers, Larry Benton of Little Rock, Arkansas and William Benton of White Hall, Arkansas; one sister, Nancy Gore of White Hall; eight grandchildren; and many nieces, nephews, and other relatives.

Wanted: Oral histories of former Southern Pacific System employees. If you wish to contribute, please contact Bill Fowler at billfowler@southernpacificjourney.org.

**Elinor Furlong
July 31, 1922 ~ Nov. 21, 2023**

Elinor Furlong, age 101, died in Elko, Nevada on November 21, 2023.

She was born July 1922 in Elko, to ranchers Carrie (Glaser) and Giconi Smiraldo. She graduated from Elko High School and then attended Heald's Business College in San Francisco. She did secretarial work in San Francisco for the Southern Pacific Hospital and Southern Pacific's law department until her retirement. She returned to Elko to be close to her grandchildren.

Her days were filled with her favorite activities such as painting China pottery, attending meeting of the local art club and the Women of Saint Joseph's, and babysitting grandchildren. She held the title Ms. Senior Elko County and competed in the state pageant in Las Vegas. She took yoga and beginner computer classes at Great Basin College. Unfortunately, she lost her sight and was blind for the last twenty years of her life.

Elinor was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, George Smiraldo and Earl Smiraldo;

and great-grandson, Bryan Skinner. She is survived by sister, Rose Mary Mariani; daughter and son-in-law, Patricia and Lyle Nutting; six grandchildren; eleven great-grandchildren; sixteen great-great-grandchildren; and nieces, nephews, and cousins.

Steven George Lautsch
July 24, 1947 ~ August 28, 2023

We are sad to announce that on August 28, 2023, at the age of 76, Steven George Lautsch passed away in San Mateo, California.

He was predeceased by his parents, Ervin George Lautsch and Edith Aline Castle and his step-mother Betty Ishimori Lautsch. He is survived by his grandson Ronan; wife Karen; children, Matthew Lautsch of San Jose, Erin Chumas (Spero) of San Mateo, California and Kathryn Cincotta (Christopher) of Palo Alto, California; granddaughter Ruthie Chumas; his siblings, Ken Lautsch of Bakersfield, California and Judy Lautsch Ward (Rick) of Loveland, Colorado; and step-sisters, Betty Brown (Duaine) of Chico, California and Mary Richardson of Stanton, California.

Editor's note: Gene Harmon and Willard Keeney said, "Steve began his Southern Pacific career in the operating department in Los Angeles. Between 1979 and 1984, he was in the marketing department and assigned as product manager - box cars and manager of national accounts. He was then appointed assistant vice president of sales in Los Angeles. His last position at Southern Pacific was in San Francisco as assistant to the vice president of sales.