

By November 1954, few PE freight motors remained in service, but Harold caught No. 1626 switching a customer off the Santa Monica Air Line at 35th and Hill streets, Los Angeles.



# Harold Stewart and the Pacific Electric

The sprawling Los Angeles interurban system was his employer and frequent photo subject

By Stan Kistler • Photos by Harold Stewart

One day in spring 2002, engineer Harold Stewart climbed down from his diesel locomotive, put his gear into the crew van, and headed for the office at Union Pacific's City of Industry yard near Los Angeles. He signed out on the register book, turned in his pay slip, and said to his fellow railroaders,

"Good-bye, boys. I'm pulling the pin." Harold was 80 years old.

What transpired that day was the culmination of a railroad career that had covered almost 62 years. And in a manner of speaking, it was all with the same railroad, as Harold never left one employer to work for another.

He was hired by the Pacific Electric

Railway in 1939, stayed on as the Southern Pacific Transportation Co. totally absorbed the PE in 1965, and then itself was merged into the Union Pacific Railroad in 1996.

This lifetime railroader was born Harold Fiske in 1922 in Pasadena, Calif., the son of a doctor. His father passed away when Harold was very



Stan Kistler

**Near the end of his 62-year career, Harold Stewart does paperwork aboard his engine on UP's Pomona Local in 2001. Fifty-one years earlier (below), he was a 27-year-old PE motorman.**

young, and his widowed mother remarried in 1925. The boy's new stepfather adopted him and give him a new surname: Stewart.

Harold attended Pasadena public schools. As a teenager he took an interest in the railroads that served his hometown. His first efforts at capturing images began when he made some highly detailed pencil sketches of his favorite Pacific Electric cars that came to Pasadena. Then, about 1936, he began to take photographs with a folding "116" camera that his parents had bought for him.

Harold's stepfather, Albert Stewart, was a lobbyist for one of the major grocery chains in Southern California. This required him to make several trips yearly between his home in Pasadena and the state capital at Sacramento. Harold and his mother would often go along, and their mode of travel was always in a compartment or drawing room aboard Southern Pacific's overnight *West Coast*, a Los Angeles-to-Portland train. Harold thus learned the niceties of first-class rail travel at an early age. While the senior Stewart was

conducting his business in the capital, Harold and his mother would often venture over to San Francisco to spend a day or two. Harold delighted in riding the cable cars and the City's numerous streetcar lines. He could always talk his mother into spending some time at SP's Third and Townsend streets depot to watch the Peninsula commute trains, too.

Closer to home, Pacific Electric was Harold's special interest in those early days. PE had many lines all throughout Southern California in the 1930's, and he made a point of riding them all and taking as many pictures as he could. He would buy a Sunday pass that PE offered for \$1 that allowed unlimited riding over the system for the day. He met some other fellows on these trips who shared a similar interest, and they too were taking pictures. He would meet up with one or more of his newfound friends on these Sunday trips and they would compare notes on

where each had been and how many lines and miles they covered in a day. Several of these young men banded together to form the Railroad Boosters, the first organized railfan club in Southern California.

Harold took a more active interest in the PE as the years passed. He would visit the general offices in the Pacific Electric Building at Sixth and Main streets in downtown Los Angeles. He was eager to learn about this complex rail system and how it operated from a management standpoint.

One day, he boldly approached the office of President Oscar A. Smith seeking some information. Smith invited Harold in, and according to what Harold told me some years later, they had a very informal conversation in which Smith took a liking to this young man. He openly answered Harold's queries on the future of PE rail service, as many lines were then being cut back or abandoned





service on lines that were showing decreasing ridership and low revenues.

In his new capacity as a bona fide employee of Pacific Electric, Harold had access to the huge Torrance Shops complex where the company maintained its rolling stock. On Sundays, he wandered the shops and made hundreds of photos of all kinds of cars. Many old wooden cars were awaiting dismantling, while others were simply stored pending their call to service when traffic rose. Newly overhauled cars and freight locomotives came out of the shops, and Harold was there to photograph them.

### Combining vocation and avocation

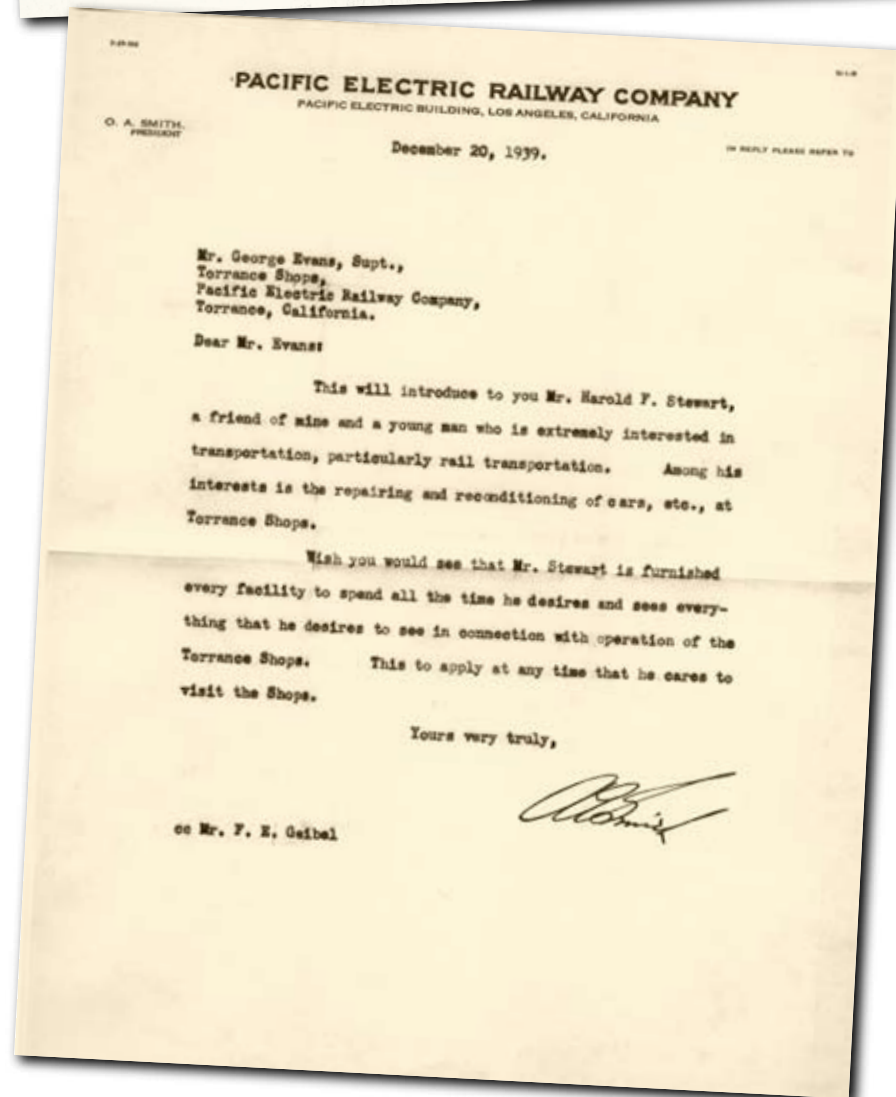
Being a PE insider had its advantages: I found photos of a single old wooden combine car where he had made multiple exposures on one of his forays in 1940, each with a different destination on the roller sign! A number of these were cities or places where PE passenger service had been abandoned for many years.

In addition to his photos, Harold collected everything he could that said PACIFIC ELECTRIC: timetables, service brochures, passes, maps, operating manuals—you name it. This applied to railroads in general too, as he raided timetable racks for public timetables of all of the major railroads across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. All this time that he was working for a railroad, Harold in his off-hours continued his rail photography. SP in the Los Angeles Basin often drew him to trackside, as did the Santa Fe, which ran a lot of trains through Pasadena.

Harold really wanted to transfer to PE's operating department to become a conductor and motorman. His chance finally came in 1943, when in November he established his road seniority date. His first "road" assignment was a fireman on one of PE's steam switch engines. (These were hand-me-down teakettles from the SP, used on non-electrified industrial spurs.) He then moved on to being a passenger conductor on the Northern District.

Harold's PE career was interrupted when Uncle Sam called him into the service in June 1944. He served in the Army's 303rd Infantry Regiment and participated in the liberation of the Philippines. He was honorably discharged in May 1946 with the rank of sergeant. He spent some time in Japan, photographing railroads before returning home to Pasadena. While in Japan, he bought a small camera that made negatives on glass plates.

Upon returning to the Pacific Elec-



**A 1938 pencil sketch of a 1200-series car was one of the many manifestations of Harold's PE interest. The teenager got to know the road's president, who instructed his shop superintendent to make Harold welcome.**

entirely in favor of motor coaches. As Harold told it, Smith alluded to the fact that the "powers that be" at 65 Market Street (headquarters of the Southern Pacific, PE's parent) in San Francisco

held a tight rein on the Pacific Electric.

In the months that followed, Harold had more visits with Smith, and in 1939, at age 17, Harold was offered a job in PE's Research Bureau as a statistical clerk. He soon advanced to Assistant Research Engineer, where his duties were directed at studies that showed the viability of continued rail



**Harold stood atop the east portal of the tunnel leading to the Subway Terminal in downtown Los Angeles on October 21, 1939, to photograph two 800 cars pulling out of Toluca Yard.**

tric, Harold quickly qualified as a motorman and was marked up on the extra board on the Northern District, based in Pasadena. This district included two passenger lines to Pasadena, one each to Sierra Madre, Monrovia, and Glendora, as well as Baldwin Park and Covina on the San Bernardino line. Box motors handled LCL freight and express, while electric locomotives worked carload traffic.

### Hostling cars at Pasadena

As low man on the extra board, Harold spent much time at the Pasadena car house in 1946 as a hostler. His duties consisted of moving cars to and from the repair pit and getting two-car sets together for rush-hour trips. In this immediate postwar period, PE was still using a mix of wooden and steel cars on its interurban lines between Los Angeles and Pasadena. The finest cars were the 50 members of the 1100 class ("Eleven-Hundreds," or "Elevens"), all-steel cars that were heavy and fast and rode well. Older steel cars of the 1200 class ("Twelves") filled in at rush hours but were more often used on the schedules of what remained of the San Bernardino line. The wooden 1000-class cars ("Tens") were quite common on the Pasadena Short Line and the Pasadena Oak Knoll line at this time, but they were almost worn out, having been worked hard throughout World War II hauling the massive passenger loads PE experienced during the conflict.

Harold once told me of an almost comical experience he had running a train of the wooden Ten-Hundreds. He was the motorman on a two-car rush-



**Former mail car 1401, acquired from a San Francisco line in 1902, was one of PE's oldest active cars when it unloaded express on South Broadway at Green Street, Pasadena, in 1938.**



**On June 8, 1940, at a point on PE's Riverside-Rialto line called Cement Plant, UP (LA&SL) 2-8-0 6057 stood outside its enginehouse as the car on which Harold was riding passed it.**



At the terminal outside the Pacific Electric Building at Sixth and Main streets in L.A., wood car 1033 awaited departure on a limited for Newport Beach and Balboa on October 29, 1939.



Harold's license to roam Torrance Shops enabled him to shoot a string of old combines destined for scrap in March 1940. He set No. 1305's sign to PICKERING PARK, a line closed in 1927.



When Colton-bound car 105 passed ATSF's San Bernardino station in 1940, no one knew PE would vanish and be largely replaced by Metrolink trains, which serve the mission-style depot.



hour train on the Pasadena Short Line. Leaving Valley Junction outbound, the line was on private right of way, with few if any grade crossings all the way to El Sereno. This was a speedway where the motormen could let their trains roll at maximum speed, which on the Tens was around 60 mph. Harold related that he was "flying" toward Indian Village when suddenly he heard a wrenching of wood as his train came to an emergency stop. The conductor from the rear car came up to him and said, "There's a six-foot section of roof torn off my car!" They walked back to investigate, and as they looked back down the track they saw the trolley pole and its base and the section of roof hanging from a span wire.

What apparently had happened was that the air cylinder on the trolley base that keeps the upward pressure on the pole to maintain contact with the wire had failed, and the pole flopped around and snagged on a span wire, ripping out



the trolley base as well as the portion of the roof. Luckily no passengers were injured. A replacement car was sent out from nearby Macy Street shops.

The next few years saw the decline of PE's rail passenger network as post-war patronage dwindled in favor of the automobile and Southern California's growing freeway system. Harold's seniority soon allowed him to bid in regular runs on the Pasadena Short Line and the Pasadena line via Oak Knoll, but still working the extra board as necessary. He told me that it was really a good job running those speedy Elevens and Twelves along the four-track private right of way on Huntington Drive, but street-running was becoming more and more congested each year, with the result that minor collisions with errant autos became more common.

In 1949 two major events occurred in Harold's life. He and friends and co-workers Gordon Jackson and Richard

Penny made a long trip over the Southern Pacific of Mexico to Guadalajara, riding in Pullmans and surveying the Mexican railroad scene. The second and more important milestone that year was his marriage to Dorothy, a lovely lady whom he had been dating.

The next year, Pacific Electric petitioned to abandon the Oak Knoll line. This line ran through some fashionable neighborhoods of Pasadena, and homeowners were complaining about the noise of the big red cars. The last revenue trains ran on October 8, 1950, and the tracks were soon taken up. The Los Angeles-Sierra Madre line also was abandoned on this date, leaving only two lines on the Northern district: Arcadia-Monrovia-Glendora and the Pasadena Short Line.

### Retrenchments in the auto age

The loss of the Oak Knoll line took a bite out of Harold's seniority. Two weeks after its discontinuance, the Pasadena

**Harold documented many aspects of the PE just before they disappeared. This scene of car 977 at Beverly Hills was made during the week before the July 7, 1940, end of service on the L.A.-Beverly Hills-Santa Monica line.**

Short Line was converted to one-man cars of the 5050 class, which didn't help his situation. He managed to hold regular jobs both as motorman and conductor through 1951, both on the Pasadena Short Line and the Monrovia-Glendora line, the latter of which still ran with two-man crews, albeit with the slower 700-class suburban cars since the big 1100's had been sold to Argentina.

The end came to Northern District rail passenger operations in September 1951. This was hastened by the construction of the San Bernardino Freeway that would sever the PE lines east of Aliso Street in downtown Los Angeles. The last regular passenger run on the Short Line ended up in Pasadena early in the morning of September 30.



Al Hawkins photo, Stan Kistler collection

**Harold Stewart was at the controls of car 1243 rolling down Pasadena's Colorado Boulevard with another "Twelve" on December 31, 1948. Banners hanging from the span wires were for the next day's Rose Parade.**

Harold was part of the crew who dead-headed the remaining cars in Pasadena back to Macy Street the following day.

What next? There was still rail service on the Glendale-Burbank line on the Western District, so Harold moved over to the Subway Terminal to qualify on the most modern cars on the PE, the double-ended PCC's bought in 1940. He told me that, try as he might, he just couldn't get the hang of running a streetcar with foot pedals. He said he had to feel that controller, brakes, and whistle cord in his hands. He decided to forego the PCC's.

Next came a short stint as a PE bus driver on the Pasadena lines—he wasn't cut out for that, either. His experience operating the big passenger cars,

though, helped him to qualify for freight service on the Southern District. He held a series of "motorner" jobs (his terminology) running the 1600-class electric freight motors in yard and freight service at Watts, Graham, El Segundo, and Torrance over the next several years.

#### Meanwhile, behind the viewfinder

While earning his livelihood from the PE, beginning about 1954 Harold began in earnest to photographically record as much of the remaining steam and electric operations in the West as he could. He covered most of the remaining PE juice operations and much SP steam in black-and-white. With Dorothy, he made numerous short trips to locations all over California where SP steam was still working: Imperial Valley, San Joaquin Valley, the Coast, Beaumont Hill and Indio, the Bay Area, and the Modoc line, to name a few. He used a Kodak Monitor

616, a high-end folding camera that made 2½ x 4¼-inch images, a camera much preferred by railroad photographers of that era. He purchased his first of many 35mm cameras in 1955, a Zeiss Contaflex, one of the first affordable single-lens reflexes. This he used just for Kodachrome color slides. All through the late 1950's, he took vacations throughout the West to photograph steam locomotives wherever he could find them, from obscure logging lines to big mainline steam on Colorado & Southern, Northern Pacific, and Union Pacific, shooting both black-and-white negatives and color slides.

As the 1960's came around, Harold was working regular jobs out of Baldwin Park, particularly the Azusa branch. All PE electrified freight operations had ceased in the late 1950's. Diesels were now the norm, with Baldwin, Electro-Motive, and Alco switchers leased from parent SP, and even some Baldwin 1,600 h.p. road-switchers on

the San Bernardino line.

By this time, Harold was an officer in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. He served on the Committee of adjustment and later as Chairman of Division 887, the PE division.

He was lured back to Mexico in 1960 in search of steam locomotives, encouraged by the late Gerald M. Best. Long-time friend and fellow railfan Phil Kauke and I accompanied Harold and Dorothy for six weeks of travel throughout Mexico in January and February 1960. It was a memorable trip, on which we were able to photograph hundreds of active steam and electric operations all over central and northern Mexico and enjoy the hospitality of the Mexican railroaders. This was just the first of many trips Harold and his wife would make to Mexico over the next 12 years, each adding to his collection of slides and negatives.

Harold was now in the employ of the Southern Pacific Transportation Co., as the Pacific Electric had been totally absorbed by its parent. His seniority was merged into the SP Los Angeles Division roster, and he could bid and hold almost any engineer's job in the L.A. Basin as far east as West Colton yard. He spoke of taking heavy ore trains down the former PE Whittier branch, and working locals out of Los Nietos and City of Industry. He preferred to be home at night in his own bed, so he worked locals and yard jobs for the last 20 years of his career. With a 1943 seniority date, he could pretty much choose any job he wanted.

All during the 1970's, '80's, and '90's Harold continued his quest to search out steam and electric lines. Europe called in 1965, and a major trip to Spain and Portugal was one of his first across the Atlantic. More trips followed as he could afford them; they would take him to Germany and the Scandinavian countries. By then he had amassed a file of more than 30,000 color slides and a similar number of black-and-white negatives.

Harold Stewart enjoyed a long life as a railfan, rail photographer, and an active railroader. His early images of his beloved Pacific Electric are the finest to be found anywhere. The rest are just icing on the cake.

I am so thankful for having Harold as a friend, confidant, and traveling companion for so many years. We made some memorable railfan trips together and shared stories of our exploits—all part of a friendship that started in a Pasadena photo shop in 1949. Sadly, it ended with his passing on December 26, 2005. 📷



**On an overcast March 1940 morning, steeple-cab 1591 waited at the north edge of San Bernardino for clearance onto city trackage with a water train from Arrowhead Springs.**



**Harold was working the Glendora line in June 1948 when, during a layover, he made this photo of his car (No. 1133) and box motor 1462 at Glendora, 26 miles east of Los Angeles.**



**Box motor 1499, a former 800-class passenger car, stood at Newport Beach, near the southeastern extremity of the PE empire, on August 24, 1946, ready to run extra up to Long Beach.**