



William James Purdie, Jr.

April 5, 1915 - July 22, 2010

Bill Purdie, Master Mechanic – Steam Engines, “RETIRED” , departed this earthly life on July 22, 2010.

A True Steam Driving Man

Bill Purdie, former Master Mechanic – Steam Engines for Southern Railway, and later Norfolk Southern Railway, had a career which afforded him the opportunity to bring smiles to thousands of people, both young and old. Beginning in 1968 with a call from then Southern Railway President, W. Graham Claytor, Jr. the adventure began. Claytor’s vision was to operate steam locomotives over Southern rails to let another generation know what a steam locomotive was. The program was so successful that it evolved into nearly year round train excursions throughout the Southeast and beyond. Purdie professionalized the rebirth of Southern Steam and in consequence, made its sight and sound self-supporting and available system-wide. Purdie began his career with Southern Railway in February 1936, as a machinist’s helper in Pegram Shops in Atlanta; he then served as machinist’s apprentice and later roundhouse foreman. Purdie preferred the shop to the road stating “The shop restores; the road debilitates.” His theory being that “The exhaust, smoke, whistling, bright headlight, and flailing rods of a photo run-by were glamorous; but the lathe, forge, drop pit, rivet furnace, crane, and hammer made the dramatics possible.” After graduation from Russell High School in East Point, Georgia, during the depression, Purdie enlisted in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). After his time with the CCC, he was able to

secure a job with Southern Railway as a machinist's helper. During WW II, he offered his service to the Army and Navy; being turned down by both because his work for the railroad was deemed as important. Determined to serve his country, he enlisted with the Merchant Marines in 1945 and served as Junior Engineer. A strong belief and deep conviction in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, led Purdie to be actively involved in the East Point Presbyterian Church for many years. He was Building Committee Chairman during the church's expansion and served in several other capacities through the years. Purdie belonged to several organizations, mostly railroad oriented. He was a charter member of the Atlanta Chapter, National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) and Southeastern Railway Museum; recently receiving 50-year membership recognition. He devoted many hours working with the museum to preserve and restore railroad equipment. Bill was an honorary member of several other NRHS chapters throughout the Southeast. Additionally, he was a member of the Southern Railway Historical Society, American Legion Post 51, the National Rifle Association, National Model Railroad Association, and was a Kentucky Colonel. During the 70's and 80's, the steam locomotives under Purdie's supervision made appearances in several Hollywood productions including "Fools Parade," "Coal Miner's Daughter," "Minstrel Man," and a Johnny Cash film. Bill Purdie was married to the former Sara Elizabeth Fries of East Point for 52 years until her death in 1993. He is also preceded in death by his parents William James Purdie, Sr. and Charlotte Taylor Purdie, both from Scotland; son John Davis Purdie; brothers Douglas, Alexander, and Kenneth; sisters, Hazel Purdie and Charlotte Boggus. He is survived by sons William James Purdie, III and wife Ruby of Milton, Georgia, and Donald Kenneth Purdie and wife Sharon of Wise, Virginia; Grandchildren Deanna Purdie, Dr. Brian Purdie, Matthew Purdie, and Jeff Roark; and one great grandchild, Juliet Rose Purdie, as well as several nieces and nephews. He also leaves behind a very dear and close friend, Joyce Harris of Atlanta. Family will receive friends at Northside Chapel Funeral Directors, 12050 Crabapple Road, Roswell, Georgia, Between 4:00 and 7:00 p.m. on Saturday,

July 24, 2010. Funeral services, officiated by Dr. Allan Purdie, will be held at East Point Presbyterian Church at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 25, 2010, followed by graveside services and interment at Hillcrest Cemetery. Family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Southeastern Railway Museum, Duluth, Georgia. www.northsidechapel.com

Previous Events

Service

JAN 1. 12:00 AM (ET)

East Point Presbyterian Church
2810 Church Street
East Point, GA

Visitation

JUL 24. 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (ET)

Northside Chapel Funeral Directors and Crematory
12050 Crabapple Road
Roswell, GA

Tribute Wall



“ *William James Purdie, Jr.*

October 08, 2022 at 11:37 AM



“ *Working with Mr. Purdie was one of the hightlights of my life. He was truly a southern gentleman and a supurb railroader. It was an absolute pleasure to fire and ride with him for thousands of miles on a number of locomotives (Mr. Purdie reminded us they were locomotives; engines were the power source, i.e.cylinders). Many, many thanks to you, Mr. Purdie, for all the commraderie, instruction and steam experiences from all of us. What a wonderful period of American RR history! My personal highlight and Thank you" was our run over the Interstate RR to make the movie, "Coal Miner's Daughter" at little Pardee, VA. Passing through the awesome Natural Tunnel with slipping drivers, thunderous exhaust, and your excellent minor chord whistle work was unmatched in my experience.*

Sam Dunaway

one of many firemen and benefactors of the Southern Steam Special program##imported-begin##Samuel M. Dunaway, Jr.##imported-end##

August 30, 2011 at 03:42 PM



“ Prayers and Thoughts even at this late date for Don, Sharon, Matthew and Jeff, and the rest of the family. I never had the pleasure of meeting Mr Purdie but just read his story, that inspired me, and know many of his offspring well. He must have been a wonderful man.

Dan##imported-begin##Dan Minahan##imported-end##

October 28, 2010 at 04:38 PM



“ Mr. Bill will be missed by so many people, myself included but I feel so blessed our paths crossed. He was a most delightful man and good in all ways and it was impossible not to love him dearly! Sincere condolences to the family. I will always have warm, fond memories of Mr. Bill and will remember him enjoying his trains and telling his wonderful stories.##imported-begin##Sabra Ray.##imported-end##

July 29, 2010 at 09:28 AM



“ Donald,
I'm so sorry, what a wonderful man your father must have been - the obituary was beautiful. We here in Wise County are thinking of you.##imported-begin##Sandy Coeburn##imported-end##

July 26, 2010 at 09:28 AM



“ *Bill Purdie touched untold multitudes of people during his career. I was fortunate to have been one of them. Through the years, I was privileged to watch as this man performed all sorts of "miracles" to get the trains over the road. Though many called him "boss", he was much more. He knew every inch of his locomotives, and was not ashamed to get his hands dirty to get the job done. Stern when the job demanded, he was privately a humble, unassuming gentleman.*

To Donald, and all the rest of his family, I thank you for sharing Bill with us. He enriched the lives of all who knew him, and we are very grateful. God bless you all during this difficult time. My prayers are with you all.##imported-begin##Jeff Sanders##imported-end##

July 24, 2010 at 07:30 PM



“ *Our sincere and deepest sympathies to all whose lives were touched by Mr. Purdie. We are all better for having known him. I have always been proud to share his birth date. I shared many memorable times aboard some of his finest locomotives. And I was proud to be with him on his last trip as he stepped off the NKP 765 into retirement. Best regards; Gary and Judy Bensman##imported-begin##Gary P. Bensman##imported-end##*

July 24, 2010 at 08:59 AM



“ My deepest sympathy to the families for their and our loss of a wonderful person. I shall never forget his willingness to share with us his knowledge of the workings of various steam locomotives under his charge. We always looked forward to seeing him during the visits to Richmond VA with the excursions. He always seemed glad to see old friends each year. Those days may be gone but not forgotten by those of us who knew him. He will be missed by all. It was a priviledge to have known him. May the Lord watch over his family in their time of need.##imported-begin##Chuck McIntyre##imported-end##

July 24, 2010 at 05:56 AM



“ Thank you, Mister Purdie for all that you have done. A sincere 'highball' from this railfan.##imported-begin##John Lewis##imported-end##

July 24, 2010 at 02:29 AM



“ Bill was a wonderful Gentleman every time I saw him. I found one photograph today with him beside NKP 765 & sent it out to a Lot of friends all over the USA. He will be missed. May God Bless the family.
David Hurt
Tupelo, MS##imported-begin##David Hurt##imported-end##

July 24, 2010 at 12:39 AM



“ Thank you Bill, for all you did for so many during your life, for we were truly blessed to know you. More than a professional, you were a teacher, friend, and most importantly, a gentleman. So many of us miss you and will never forget you as the memories will live on.

Joann and I extend our deepest sympathies to the Purdie family.##imported-begin##Jim and JoAnn Herron##imported-end##

July 24, 2010 at 12:05 AM



“ What wonderful and fond memories I have for over 40 years of our families being together "riding the rails". Those I shall cherish and think of as I always have now with a little more sadness as we have lost "dad" as my daddy always called Mr.Purdie. My most sincere sympathy to you all for your loss.##imported-begin##Aletha Brock England##imported-end##

July 23, 2010 at 06:35 PM