

James C. Fletcher **Administrator of NASA**

James C. Fletcher was born June 5, 1919 in Millburn, New Jersey, the third of six children, to Harvey Fletcher and Lorena Chipman. His father, Harvey is known as the “Father of Stereophonic sound”. Fletcher graduated from Bayside High School in New York City in 1937. Next came two years of college at Brigham Young University. Fletcher earned a bachelor’s degree in physics from Columbia College of Columbia University in 1940 and a Ph.D in physics in 1948 from the California Institute of Technology.

During all of his teaching and schooling, he met and married Fay Lee of Brigham City, Utah on November 2, 1946 and had 4 children, Ginger, Sue, Stephen and Barbara.

During World War II, he was a Navy research physicist. After holding research and teaching positions at Harvard and Princeton Universities, he joined Hughes Aircraft in 1948 and later worked at the guided missile Division of the Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation. In 1958, he co-founded the Space Electronics Corporation in Glendale, California, which after a merger, became the Space General Corporation. He was later named systems vice president of the Aerojet General Corporation in Sacramento, California. In 1964, he became president of the University of Utah, a position he held until he was named NASA Administrator by President Richard M. Nixon in 1971.

During his first administration at NASA, April 1971 to May 1977, Fletcher was responsible for beginning the Space Shuttle effort, as well as the Viking program that sent landers to Mars. He oversaw Skylab missions and approved the Voyager space probes and the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project.

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan selected Fletcher to administer NASA for a second time, May 1986 to April 1989, to help the agency recover from the Space Shuttle Challenger accident. Dr. Fletcher directed the complete redesign of many of the components of the Shuttle, enhancing its safety and adding an escape method for the astronauts. He also greatly expanded the use of expendable launch vehicles in sending satellites into space. Fletcher oversaw the return of the Space Shuttle to flight on September 29, 1988. He served as Administrator until April 8, 1989, into the term of Reagan’s successor, President George H. W. Bush. Before his final retirement from NASA came on April 8, 1989, he also approved the Hubble Space Telescope program.

Fletcher, 72, who twice served as head of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, died of cancer Dec. 22, 1991 at Georgetown University Hospital.

You can find his gravesite in the Salt Lake City Cemetery, designated in Plat West, Block 7, Lot 41, Grave 4 West.

