Ernest C. Gaston’s lifetime of service to the power industry included general responsibility for the supervision and design of more than fifty steam generating plants in six states. He was a vice-president, chief engineer, and a director of the Southern Electric Generating Company and was named president of Southern Services, Inc., in 1957. The company’s Wilsonville, Alabama, plant was named the Ernest C. Gaston Steam Plant in his honor.

Born in Whistler in Mobile County, Mr. Gaston received a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Alabama. From 1930 until 1939, he worked in various engineering capacities for Dixie Construction Company; its successor, Allied Engineers, Inc.; and the Commonwealth and Southern Corporation. In 1939, Mr. Gaston was promoted to chief design engineer, a position he held until Commonwealth and Southern was dissolved in 1949. When the company dissolved, however, its engineering department remained intact and continued to perform the same functions for a new company, Southern Services, Inc.

Mr. Gaston continued to serve as chief design engineer after the transition. In this capacity he had the general responsibility for supervising and designing fifty-three steam generating plants (totaling about five million kilowatts of generating capacity) and four hydroelectric projects (totaling approximately 350 thousand kilowatts). In 1952, he was elected a vice-president, chief engineer, and a director of Southern Services, holding responsibility for all engineering services. On January 1, 1957, Mr. Gaston became president of Southern Services; he served as president of the Southern Electric Generating Company from September 11, 1962, to December 1, 1963.

Mr. Gaston was involved in many professional organizations. He was a trustee and member of the executive committee for the High Temperature Reactor Development Company, and a director of the Southeastern Electric Exchange. He served as president of the Engineers Club of Birmingham, as chairman of the Engineering Council of Birmingham and Jefferson County, and as a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. In 1960, he received the George Westinghouse Gold Medal Award from this society, for his “distinguished achievements and notable contributions to the power field of mechanical engineering.” In 1963, Mr. Gaston was made a fellow in the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and received the Engineer of the Year Award for 1962–63 from the Alabama Chapter of the National Society of Professional Engineers.

Mr. Gaston was an outstanding engineer whose vision, enthusiasm, executive ability, and professional excellence played a profound part in the tremendous development of electrical-energy generation and transmission in the South. His continuous interest, study, and planning in the area of atomic power development helped keep the region abreast of activities in that field.

Mr. Gaston was married to the former Bonnie Pearl Bullock.