



GENE W. SING EARNS MMR # 544

My first memory of owning and operating a model train was during my early teens, although there must have been an earlier use — I have a Lionel 027 train set that I brought with me from my parents' house. The train layout was a simple oval built on an 8x8-foot plywood table with a 4x12-foot addition for a two-track yard. I used to get help from my friend Frank Maher to go down to the local hardware store to carry the 4x8 sheets of plywood to my parents' house. The original purpose of this table was to support playing WWII war games using AHM Minitanks and AIRFIX Minimen.

The motive power I used was an Athearn 40-ton switcher that employed rubber bands to transfer the power from the motor to the trucks. Those were the good old days! The layout stayed up through high school and college, but like many others, the trains took a back seat to the progression of life. I got married, had kids, served in the Army in several active duty tours at various stateside and overseas assignments in Germany, South Korea, and the Sinai. Even throughout this busy time there was an occasional train purchase (sure signs of an addiction).

The greatest change in my hobby activity came in 1999 when we moved from Bangor, Maine, to Cary, North Carolina. Getting a new job as construction project manager

and joining the local train club sparked the model railroad construction bug. I constructed a five-foot diameter helix for the club. The house we bought in Cary had a great crawl space. Over a three-year period, I hand-dug out more than 2,400 five-gallon buckets of clay and put in a multi-level four-inch reinforced concrete floor, also all hand-mixed and poured. (I know, I have to be crazy to do all this!)

Encouragement from Master Model Railroaders David Lynam and Richard A. Genthner got me

into the NMRA Achievement Program (AP).

My journey to MMR started by supporting my son's Boy Scout Troop 216. Helping the troop as the equipment quartermaster, I also was the merit badge counselor for collections, coin collecting, and railroading. As such, I organized classes through the train club, so the Scouts could achieve the Railroading Merit Badge in a single day. Along with presenting classes, I coordinated the paperwork so the Scouts could take their completed blue cards back to their troop. Over four years, I helped more than 200 Scouts obtain their railroad Merit Badge.

Construction is my focus area. I enjoy the construction part of the hobby, especially creating the benchwork and hand-laying the track. I don't think I would have completed the MMR if I didn't do what I consider the "easier" AP areas first.

I model the Maine Central and Bangor & Aroostook Railroad. Presently, I have about 500 feet of hand-laid Code 83 track and about 130 hand-laid switches. The layout I am building is only 20 percent complete at this time. I became interested in hand-laying track when I first saw hand-laid track at the Eastern Maine Model Railroad Club in Orland, Maine. When I first saw it, not only did I think it would be very difficult to do, but also as a challenge to myself to try to master. I find hand-laying track is both fun

and therapeutic. It is very relaxing as long as you don't set a quota to lay x-number of feet of track during a certain time period.

It was a struggle completing the Structures Certificate because of how each person's interpretation of what was supposed to be in the structure. The Cars AP Certificate didn't prove to be as difficult as I feared, once I learned how to construct the car base. I find it an interesting area to model, and I am now working on a Fleischmann Transportation Company vinegar car (*Railroad Model Craftsman*, March 2005). The car is a combination of a brass frame with a wooden tank. I think it will prove interesting when I finish it!

A good friend, Stephen Wood, who recently received his MMR, knew how close I was and challenged me to complete the MMR requirements sometime this decade! Sometimes you need some good-natured needling and encouragement to focus on completing the job.

I am a firm believer in the philosophy of "Pay it Forward" in our hobby. Lately, I have been offering Saturday clinics once a month to the Carolina Piedmont Division-13 membership and soon will offer it to patrons of several local train shops. Classes had been on constructing a basic wood Bar Mills craftsman structure and how to make a styrene building not to look like plastic. Future classes will include how to scratchbuild a wood boxcar (AP-related), proper use and cleaning of an airbrush, weathering techniques, and how to construct a 2x4-foot modular. The sky's the limit!

Completing the MMR has been a rewarding accomplishment that has made model railroading even more enjoyable. I look forward to continuing to grow and develop my interests in this fascinating hobby. Today, I am on the verge of retiring from full-time work and starting to concentrate on developing a train-themed park for the greater Raleigh, North Carolina, area. When ultimately completed, we hope to have an 87,500-square-foot building housing N, HO, O scale layouts with LGB, 7½ live steam and two-foot foot narrow gauge on 40 to 100 acres of land. Come see us at www.PiedmontRailroadMuseum.org.

I am also interested in Maine's two-foot narrow gauge railroads. In particular, the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Narrow Gauge Railway located in Alna, Maine. This operation has two original WW&F steam locomotives and is being rebuilt in its original

right-of-way. They are doing such a fabulous job restoring and rebuilding the original railroad that I now have a life membership with the organization and intend to assist them as much as possible. If you are in Maine for a vacation, try dropping in; they are really friendly and willing to show you around.

AP Certificates - Gene W. Sing

Association Volunteer

Model Railroad Engineer - Civil

Master Builder - Structures

Master Builder - Cars

Model Railroad Engineer - Electrical

Master Builder - Scenery

Model Railroad - Dispatcher