BEN PEARLMAN PASSES

Ben Pearlman, 1942–2006

It is with much sadness that we report the passing of Bennett “Ben” Pearlman on Thursday, June 22 of 2006. The National Model Railroad Association has lost a member who has contributed much to our national organization, and to the Lone Star Region as well.

Ben was born in New Kensington, Pennsylvania on December 6, 1942. While he was in his middle teens the family moved to Houston, Texas. Upon graduation from San Jacinto High School he attended the University of Houston. He left school to pursue a career in the television industry.

While in college, Ben met his future wife, Irene Pearl Chanowsky. They were married in 1966. In time the family expanded to include daughters Marci and Lisa. During that period he formed a film and television production company, garnering Ben the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Houston as well as industry tributes such as the Telly award.

His love of trains eventually led him to the NMRA. Being the dynamic individual he was, it was inevitable that he would become a key leader in the organization. He started as Vice President of the Lone Star Region from 1987–89 and President from 1989–93. He was co-chair of the NMRA national convention in Houston in 1989. In 1994 Ben
was appointed Chair of the (National Membership) Services Department, in which post he served until 2005. In this position he was overseer of the various membership services provided by National. He was also instrumental in conceiving, then designing the framework for the Heritage and Living Legend cars series produced by the NMRA.

Pearlman Productions was sold in 2002. Ben was then able to pursue his model railroad hobby in a different manner. He opened Papa Ben’s Train Place at 2506 South Bend Boulevard in Houston. The shop became well-known as a place where the area’s model railroaders could find the trains, materials, and advice they needed. Ben was one of those lucky individuals who was able to combine successfully his work and hobby. He enjoyed both to the fullest.

At the recent NMRA National Model Railroad Convention held in Philadelphia, Ben’s years of service to the organization were recognized. Ben was given the well-deserved honor of being named Honorary Life Member #44. The plaque announcing this award was rushed to his family in Houston. His name and number will be inscribed on the permanent HLM plaque displayed at the NMRA’s headquarters in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Those of us who knew Ben personally will miss his quick wit and excellent business sense, as well as his willingness to serve the organization. His many accomplishments on behalf of the membership of the NMRA will long stand as a testament to his commitment, his energy, and his dedication to the hobby, the NMRA, and his many friends around the world.

—Dr. Robert Chait
I, Thomas E. Shook (Tom), was a youth in the tank town of Cisco, Texas, along the Texas & Pacific Railroad, a mainline station in the hills about 100 miles west of Ft. Worth. During the World War II era (1938–1944) I was ages 10 through 16, and enjoyed four passenger trains daily as they stopped for water, along with troop trains and heavy military freight shipments. The station agent, Mr. Pugh (3–11 shift), allowed me the opportunity to sell tickets, plan schedules for passengers out of the Railway Guide, receive telegrams, fire the coal stove in the station, and the like. I also had the opportunity to listen to the dispatcher in Ft. Worth and recall the importance of the message “By Lancaster Yard, Ft. Worth,” for it was then we knew the exact time the Sunshine Special No. 1 would arrive and receive water and block ice for the Pullman—in five minutes! The T&P station was a joint station with the MKT “tin can line” from Stamford, Texas, to Waco, Texas, and had a gas electric motor car due there at 5 pm. The station had an interlocking plant so the agent was extremely busy writing and handling orders to a multitude of trains.

My first train was a blue-and-silver windup Bullet train manufactured by Marx. I had many cars, but also a chemistry set or two, and played in the band. I was 17 in 1945 and moved to Lubbock, Texas, where I was a chemistry and engineering major at Texas Tech. I was exposed to the AT&SF.

I graduated from Texas Tech and went to graduate school at Oklahoma State until I was drafted into the Army in October 1951. After basic I was sent to Pine Bluff Arsenal as a physical science research assistant and reassigned to the chemical warfare unit at Ft. Detrick, Maryland, for one year. This started a 44-year career as a civilian supervising engineer-scientist with the Army material command. As a scientist I made many trips by train (Pullman) to Washington, Baltimore, California, and so on. Upon retirement I found I had clocked over one million miles—what a life!

In 1965 I joined a new railroad club which met in Little Rock Union Station (MoPac) and became a charter member; I also joined the NMRA in 1965. I met many modelers of exceptional skill and a NMR, Paul Moon, started me on the way. The NMRA magazine was run by Clif Towers, an exceptional person who put out a magazine that everyone looked forward to reading. I met him twice over the years; he was Mr. NMRA.

I married Betty Rice Shook in 1958, after completing graduate school in biochemistry at the University of Arkansas Medical Center. We had three children. She is now deceased and my current wife Margaret Shook and I are well-known in model railroading circles. I have one step-daughter.

Paul Moon and I hosted three Mid-Continent Region conventions in Little Rock over the years and were associated with many fine modelers. My first certificate was in 1971, and I completed my last (structures) in June 2006. I would encourage others to be involved in the hobby and attend the conventions. Marty Vaughn, Patrick Harriman, and Richard Napper encouraged me to go for MMR. My railroad is now 1,000 square feet, started in about 1968, and is still under construction. The railroad is a DC cab operation that now has sound courtesy of Broadway Limited, Athearn, etc. Model railroading is a wonderful hobby and allows many opportunities to develop your skills.

I am a Presbyterian elder, an emeritus member of the American Chemical Society, Sigma Xi, Kappa Kappa Psi, and the Arkansas Railroad Club where I am the director of the Little Rock Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. I have attended eight national conventions of the NMRA, and many in the Mid-Continent Region. The second and third digits of my MMR #378 are also my age. Happy Railroading.

Tom has earned AP Certificates in Cars, Structures, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Chief Dispatcher, Association Official, Association Volunteer, and Model Railroad Author.