



Remembering Jim Barrett

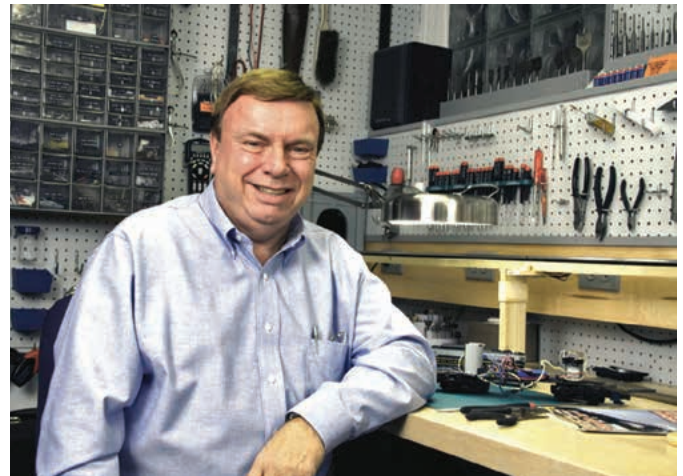
By Rich Melvin

Jim Barrett . . . what a great guy.

I first met Jim back in 1993, when former *O Gauge Railroading* magazine owner Myron Biggar wanted to produce a video series for *OGR*. Myron had hired my video production company to produce those videos. Myron introduced me to Jim, who was to become the host of the now-famous *Jim Barrett in the Backshop* video series. I was immediately struck by Jim's genuine friendliness and affability. He was the classic "nice guy." There are those times when you meet someone, and within the first few minutes of meeting them, it seems like you've been friends for years. That's how it was with Jim and me.

I got to know Jim better as we started working on his Backshop videos. Jim had never done any video work before, but he had been a teacher. He had no problem at all speaking to a camera, but he was unfamiliar with the video production process. It was here that I saw how much Jim was committed to making truly good videos that would be easily understood by his audience. I had only a single video camera at the time, but we needed to shoot both wide shots and close-ups of whatever Jim was working on. That meant that Jim basically had to do everything twice, once on a wide shot and again on a close-up. To a lesser man, undoing ten or fifteen minutes of intricate, careful work just to have to do it all over again would have been a terrible source of frustration. Not for Jim! It didn't bother him at all to have to do things twice, or to have two examples of whatever we were working on ready for the video. His focus was always on his audience, and his concern was always that his audience would understand whatever it was he was teaching. Those videos have stood the test of time, and they show what a great teacher Jim truly was.

Jim had to deal with some tough times in his life. In the mid-2000s he went through a difficult divorce. He lost his house and most of his train collection in that divorce. More recently, he lost his



Jim at his Backshop workbench



When the Fort Wayne RR Historical Society held a Throttle Time event with Nickel Plate 765, Jim and several friends took advantage of this unique opportunity. Jim has his hands on the throttle of the Big Berk, just getting underway. Long-time NKP 765 Engineer and former *OGR* Publisher, Rich Melvin, is sitting behind Jim, coaching him on the operation of the huge locomotive.



Jim was a fan of the muscle cars of the 1960s. His prized possession was this 1965 Mustang convertible. It's a true "pony car" that originally had the famous Ford 289 engine in it. Jim upgraded the engine to a more modern, high-performance 302, and this thing is really fast! Note the unique "Got Pony" Ohio license plate.



Pictured are two guys who were fantastic ambassadors for the O gauge hobby. Jim was good friends with the late Marty Fitzhenry.



Sometimes you have to crawl under the layout to a pop-up opening in order to solve an issue. And, of course, the more visitors you have in the train room, the more likely a problem will occur. Jim was an excellent problem-solver!



Chuck Hamner, Bob Bartoizek, and Jim were assistants for an evening operating session at Bill Bramlage's Tower City layout. The session was for a party for the local historical society. These guys ran the layout successfully for several hours, with the promise of food after the party was over. Sadly for the crew, historical society patrons ate all the food.



Jim worked with Rich Melvin in the production of many of the *OGR* videos. Here, Jim poses with Terry Johnson (left) and Rich Melvin (right) just after finishing the shooting of Terry's layout. Jim was proud to be a partner in *O Gauge Railroading* magazine. Note the vanity license plate on his beloved Mercury.



Jim and Karen



Jim built a beautiful, complicated, roll-out trestle on his layout. With three curved trestles, it was the focal centerpiece of his layout. It was his pride and joy, and Jim was very proud of it. Unfortunately, he never got to finish the river and the canyon wall scenery before he passed.

second wife, Karen, to the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. And yet, every time I talked with Jim during those tough times, he was always upbeat, happy, and positive about the future. Jim was definitely a "glass-is-half-full" kind of guy.

In the face of all this adversity, Jim's salvation was this hobby. His unending passion for the O gauge railroading hobby sustained him through those tough times. When he lost his house in the divorce, Jim moved to a new house and immediately began drawing up plans for a new layout. That layout became the source of inspiration for his Backshop columns over the past seven years. His *Building a Layout* series of forty-five articles documented his progress on a fantastic 3-rail layout. It is a tremendous body of work that has been preserved in a book published by *OGR*.



You can see a video of Jim rolling this entire trestle in and out of his layout at ogaugerr.com/jim.

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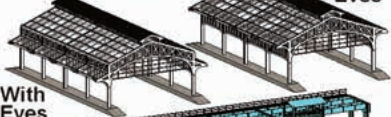
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Jim worked with Rich on the production of the Tower City video at the home of Bill Bramlage. Here, Jim has just set the camera in place for a shot of Bill's layout.



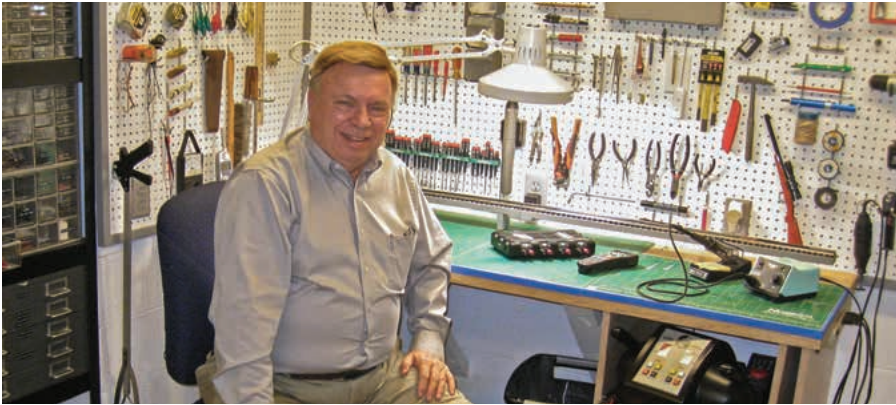
Jim also worked with Rich on the production of the OGR video about the Misty Mountain Railroad in Blairsville, Georgia. Here he is talking with the late Charles Griffin, builder of the Misty Mountain, just as he had finished the shoot.



Jim was a fan of 12-inch-to-the-foot scale steam. On a visit to the Ohio Central Railroad several years ago, he got the chance to visit the cab of 4-6-2 number 1293.



Jim was often the engineer when shooting complicated video scenes with multiple trains running. Here, Jim operates several trains with the MTH DCS remote while Rich shoots a scene on Bill Bramlage's Tower City layout.



Jim's workbench was a work of art. It was always clean, organized, and well laid out for working on just about anything. It was a classic example of the old saying, "A place for everything, and everything in its place." He had parts cabinets at the left and all his tools were on the pegboard in front of him. He also had a test track that was connected to his layout for test running repaired locomotives. Countless trains were repaired on the bench over many years. R.I.P., Jim.

When Jim Barrett died, OGR Publishing Company lost a great partner and writer, the hobby lost another wonderful ambassador, and I lost a dear friend . . . for now. I'll see Jim again in the next life, but for now there's a big void in this life. That's because, in many ways, Jim was larger than life. His big smile, his never-ending words of encouragement, his always positive attitude, his knack for making complicated things easy to understand, his character, and his just plain friendliness made him a class act in this world.

We are all going to miss Jim ... he was a great guy. 🍷

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