

Life was dedicated to hobby

James O. Williams, MMR 232

Although we know that Jim Williams passed away in May of 1995, he was very proud of having earned his Master Model Railroader certificate No. 232. We thought that you would like to share his story. Jim Williams was a life member of the NMRA and North Central Region. He lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and was President of the Arnold, Weaver & Williams Insurance Agency. Jim's wife "Ev," who preceded him in death, was well known throughout the NMRA and helped him with his many NMRA activities. Jim passed away while on an inspection trip for an upcoming NMRA National Convention.

Jim's first encounter with trains was at the age of six months. His grandmother said every night when the passenger trains on the N&W went by he insisted on being picked up and taken to the front door to watch them go by. He received his first train, a figure-eight Lionel steam freight, at about age five. During his high school days he spent many hours at the local Dispatcher's office. This location, Kermit, W. Va., a town of approximately 500, was on a double track main line featuring seven single-tracked tunnels. More than 80 trains passed here each day, 150 coal drags, time freights, express passenger trains and locals. There were eight trains a day that stopped at Kermit, so it was quite easy to take the train.

During the summer between his junior and senior years in high school, Jim worked on a N&W signal crew. Since he was only 15 at the time, he lied about his age to hire on. One very hot day the foreman sent Jim out with the work train, complete with a 200-ton steam crane, to lift a two mast signal in place and screw it down. They had

only 15 minutes to clear the line for the express passenger train, and they made it with five minutes to spare.

Jim's love for trains never decreased, but did move to the back burner for about three years. In 1948 he discovered a hobby shop with a TT-scale layout. He also found the local club, The Ann Arbor Model Railroad Club. Although he was underage, they took him in as a junior member. Other than a two-year stint in the Army Combat Engineers, he was a member until his death. He served the club as director, vice president, president and agent of record.

He joined the NMRA in the late '50s and later became a life member. He served as chair of the 1971 regional convention, and was active in the NMRA from that time on. He served as region vice president, area vice president and chair of the 1978 National Convention in Dearborn. He served 15 years as National Convention Department chair, and trustee for the North Central Region. He modeled in HO and HO_n3, with a 12 X 20 layout named the Junction City & Western. •

