



First train sighting frightened boy, horses

Pete Ellis earns MMR No. 263

Pete's first experience with railroading occurred when he was three years old. He was born on a ranch in the mountains 10 miles west of Cascade, Mont. When the family wanted to go to town and their car, a Model T, wouldn't start they just took a team and buckboard instead. On one such occasion Pete's father tied the team to a post at the depot and left

Pete to wait on the seat of the buckboard. While Pete was waiting patiently he saw a huge black, snorting, hissing, monstrosity with a bright light on the front coming down the track. The team of horses was as frightened as Pete was and later Pete was told that he was screaming his lungs out with fright.

A few years later, Pete's family moved into Cascade where he attended school. This afforded him the opportunity to hang around the depot where he got to know the daytime operator, Mr. Stauffer, a patient man who answered Pete's many questions.

Pete's father was a cattle and horse trader as well as a rancher. One of his friends was a conductor on the Great Northern Railroad, so Pete got an opportunity to ride in the cab of an M-2 while switching the yard in Cascade in the 1930s. Pete's grandfather was a fireman and engineer on the Northern Pacific for 30 years in the late 1800s so there is lots of railroad blood in his family.

When he was 14 Pete accompanied a neighbor rancher with a load of cattle to the Union Stockyards in Chicago. He rode in the drover's coach so they could feed and water the cattle en route returning home using coach passes.

Pete's model railroad interest started in 1949 when his stepmother took him to Colorado. In Denver he visited the Hobby House (which later became Caboose Hobbies) and purchased an Athearn 40' Great Northern

Boxcar and a copy of *Model Railroader* magazine both of which he still treasures. Pete joined the NMRA in 1956 and has become a life member in the 1977.

Pete says that he has met many fine people through the hobby but on person, Bob Gardner of Salmon Arm, BC, deserves special praise as a mentor. Pete has helped start two clubs in Great Falls and freely shares his knowledge and talents with all who are interested. He has a large reference library and photo collection to help with the teaching. Pete has edited the 6th Division Pacific Northwest Region newsletter "the Highball" which he enjoyed a lot.

Now he is a retired rancher and has other interests besides model railroading. He loves photography, collects antiques, bronze art objects, books, toy trucks and machinery and he enjoys target and "varmint" shooting. Pete does have an HO scale layout, called the Treasure State Railway, in a separate building. It has connection with the GN, NP and Milwaukee.

Pete has earned Certificates in Scenery, Cars, Civil, Electrical, Official, Volunteer and Author. •

PLEASE CONTINUE READING ON THE NEXT PAGE

The Following is Pete's Obituary, many thanks to the Great Falls Tribune Online:

"CASCADE -- Remington Peter "Pete" Ellis, 72, a retired rancher, Army veteran and model train enthusiast, died of cancer Wednesday at his home in Cascade. A memorial celebration of his life will take place at a later date. Cremation has taken place under the direction of Croxford Funeral Home and Crematory.

Survivors include a daughter, Nadine Adams of Cascade; a son, William Hellman of Virginia Beach, Va.; a sister, Ella Bently of Juneau, Alaska; and four grandchildren, Bret Hellman and Leila, Justin and Rachel Adams.

Pete was born June 19, 1931, in a cabin on the Ellis Ranch northwest of Cascade, Mont. He attended Cascade High School and was a U.S. Army veteran, having been stationed in the U.S. and Japan. Following military service, he spent two years in the Red Bluff, Calif., area, in the employ of the California State Division of Forestry.

Pete then returned to Cascade to ranch with his father. They raised purebred Hereford cattle until Pete's retirement from ranching in 1984. After retiring, he worked part-time as a brand inspector for the Montana Department of Livestock.

His interests included his stewardship and love for the land. His hobbies were travel, history, photography, and building and collecting railroad and transportation models as well as memorabilia and related antiques. Over many years, Pete amassed an extensive book and photo library on these subjects.

His extensive model railroad, depicting the mountains, prairies, industrial and railway scenes of Montana, was built over a span of more than 50 years. It was visited by countless numbers of hobby enthusiasts from all parts of the U.S., Canada, England, Australia, Spain and many other countries. He was well-known for his many scratch-built buildings, bridges and railway structures, all based on research and his creative imagination. He was an enthusiast of steam locomotives, narrow gauge and logging railroads, as well as the railways of Montana. His knowledge of these subjects aided many fellow hobbyists, with Pete being highly regarded for his willingness to share and assist others involved in the hobby.

He was a member of the Masonic Order and the Shrine, and was a lifetime member of the National Model Railroad Association, earning the coveted NMRA Master Modeler award. Other memberships included the Great Northern Railway Historical Society, Milwaukee Road Historical Society, and Northern Pacific Railway Historical Society. Pete was a member of the Great Falls Toy Collectors Club and a former member of the Great Falls Model Railroad Club. He regularly attended conventions and meetings of all of these organizations.

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This lifetime hobby resulted in Pete consulting to the Walt Disney Company's Imagineering Department, showing Disney staff members his many modeling and scenic diorama techniques.

Pete traveled extensively in the U.S. and Canada, as well as to Australia and South America. He enjoyed photography and chronicled thousands of scenes of railway equipment, as well as images of unusual and architecturally interesting buildings.

Pete was a loving and caring father. He was known for his generosity to others, his sense of humor and his special touch handling animals on the ranch. Many a snuffy cow came around to taking rations from the gentle hand of Pete Ellis.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Florence Ellis; his father, William B. Ellis; and stepmothers Helen and Gae Ellis."

Pete hosted several of Milwest's Winter Board Meetings in recent years - not surprisingly, these meetings were among the most productive we had, eager to "adjourn" to his model railroad!! He was a true gentleman, gracious host, and willing ambassador for the hobby. "Colorful" hardly began to describe Pete; he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.