



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of WILLIAM (BILL) R. BARR



Born December 12, 1934 Started modeling in 1946
AMA #31415

Written & Submitted by WRB (05/2003); Transcribed & Edited by SS (06/2003)

Career:

- As a youth entered Free Flight contests in Oklahoma City and Enid, Oklahoma; his first trophy was display along with his model in the local grocery store window
 - Received a doctorate in theology from Yale University and then began teaching at Lexington (Kentucky) Theological Seminary
 - Has served in all offices of the Lexington Model Airplane Club
 - As an adult has flown in Free Flight contests in Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee and Alabama
-

This hobby/sport of ours can come to have a powerful fascination for some people. Here is how it happened to me.

Born in 1934, I grew up on a farm in a small rural community in Oklahoma, about 60 miles northwest of Oklahoma City. Until the age of 12, I had never seen nor heard of flying model airplanes. Just by chance, I happened to pick up a copy of Air Trails magazine one day in an area drugstore. Almost from that moment, I was hooked. I sent away to America's Hobby Center in New York for a motor-kit combo and I spent many hours (as well as did our neighbors thereabout) trying to get that balky Thor ignition engine to run – which, alas, it never did. Then, the following Christmas my parents gave me an O&R .23 glow and I was in business.

Many trial and error efforts and crashes occurred after that. But, through reading magazine articles and, eventually, contacts with hobby shops in Oklahoma City, I began to master enough skills to construct a model decently and to adjust it to fly. Soon I was entering Free Flight contests in Enid and Oklahoma City. I admired Ray Matthews and the Oklahoma City boys as well as the Tulsa Glue Dobbers and was usually trounced by them in area contests. However, I did luck out in some meets and brought home a trophy or two. The first trophy I won attracted such attention in our little farm town that the owner of the local grocery invited me to display the trophy and model in the window facing the street.

Soon college years found me a little preoccupied with books and dates with little time for models, although I did manage to construct a Zeek and place in an area meet. Following college was seminary study and then graduate study at Yale for a doctorate in theology. When I landed a teaching position at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Kentucky, I returned to model building, mainly as a form of relaxation from the pressures of teaching – working with my hands rather than abstract concepts. I became involved with the Lexington Model Airplane Club and, eventually, served in all the offices of the club. I hooked up with a fellow Free Flyer

(although most of the club members were RC-ers), O.C. Stewart, and we took in a number of area contests.

During these years (the 1960s and 1970s), I was flying Fubars, Zeeks, and Stardusters, and became increasingly attracted to Dick Mathis' designs published in Flying Models magazine. I flew Triggers, Pandemoniums and Headhunters and the ½-A derivative Jalapena (one of which I'm still flying!). I flew in Indiana and Ohio contests, at Wright-Patterson airfield in Dayton, Ohio, at the Tullahoma meets in Tennessee and in the Huntsville, Alabama, meets. One of my most interesting flights was a peanut scale Fike that put in a five minute and 37 second flight at a meet in Huntsville at the old municipal airport. Just rode gentle risers across the field and landed on the runway.

After my retirement in 1997 we began spending six months in Florida (October through May) and the other six in Lexington, during which I've attended several Nationals (Nats) and enjoyed being with the Florida flyers as well as with our friend Vivian Cain. Since coming to Florida, I've enjoyed flying with new fellow aficionados at Palm Bay, and have been greatly assisted and supported by my wife Donna and son Greg.

I've lost plenty of models, but sometimes they do come back to you. For instance, at an Ohio meet, one of my early ½-A nostalgia models, a Pogo, got in a booming thermal and even the dethermalizer couldn't bring it down. A farmer called me a couple of weeks later and said he had found the model in his pasture – 18 miles away from the contest site.

More recently, I lost another Pogo, this one during a test flying session at Palm Bay. Apparently one of the FAI flyers found it months later out in the scrub beyond the field and brought back the fuselage with engine and timer still in good shape. I still, though, would like to know where all those other lost models are.

*(signed) William R. Barr
May 2003*

This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.

AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

