



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of RUSSELL E. BARRERA



1918 - May 8, 1979

Written by SS (9/2002)

Career:

- Operated a hobby shop in San Marcus, California
 - 1977: Opened a private gallery of model aeronautics in San Marcos; moved the gallery to San Martin, California, at the beginning of 1979
 - Made and flew gliders in his 20s
 - Served as a judge in national competitions
 - Member of the Aero National Historical Society
 - Founding member of the Flightmasters model airplane club
 - Member of the Society of Antique Modelers (club 21), the AMA and the Experimental Aircraft Association
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The following information was garnered from various article clippings, original letters and other material the AMA had on file about Russell Barrera.

The first item is the obituary that ran in Russell Barrera's local newspaper after his death. The date of publication and the name of the newspaper are not evident, but Russell lived in San Jose, California. The original clipping of the obituary from the newspaper is located in the National Model Aviation Museum's Archives. Russell Barrera passed away on May 8, 1979.

Russell Barrera

A Memorial Mass of Christian burial for Russell E. Barrera, 61, native San Josean and noted model-airplane enthusiast, will be said at 1 p.m. today at St. Catherine's Church, Morgan Hill.

Barrera died Tuesday in a San Jose hospital after a nine-week illness.

He returned to his birthplace one and a half years ago after spending most of his life in Southern California.

Semi-retired, he last operated a hobby shop in San Marcus (San Diego County, California) where he opened a private museum of model aeronautics two years ago.

Barrera hoped to develop a large museum and was in the process of setting it up in San Martin in the Hill Country cluster of airplane memorabilia adjacent to the Flying Lady Restaurant when he suffered his last illness. A board of directors will attempt to finish the non-profit Russ Barrera National Museum of Model Aeronautics.

Barrera's collection includes one of the first Radio Controlled models to fly across the nation. He also had a collection of model plane magazines going back to shortly after the Wright Brothers first flight.

Barrera, who made and flew gliders in his 20s and was a national judge in model competitions, was a member of the Aero National Historical Society, a founder member of Flightmasters, Society of Antique Modelers 21 Club, Academy of Model Aeronautics, and the Experimental Aircraft Association.

He leaves his wife, Lorraine; three daughters, Barbara Carnes of Cupertino, Patricia Rogers of Morgan Hill and Madeline Medina of Canova; a sister, Delores Rosenheim of Arizona, and seven grandchildren.

Barrera's ashes will be scattered at sea from a small private plane.

The following is a letter that John Worth, AMA executive director at the time, sent to Russell's wife, Lorraine, after Russell's death.

*Academy of Model Aeronautics
National Headquarters
815 15th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005*

May 9, 1979

*Mrs. Lorraine Barrera
P.O. Box 670
San Martin, CA 95046*

Dear Lorraine,

Carl Goldberg passed on the news about Russ and as I write this, sadly, I'm quietly in awe of your husband's will to live – most people would have succumbed sooner, I am sure. But that's part of what we will long remember about Russ; the determination to hang in there despite pains and frustration. Mostly, however, I think I will keep seeing his friendly smile – that's the memory that lingers on.

Meanwhile, the sorrow that goes with all this needs to be converted into help to preserve what Russ worked so hard for. The best way modelers can pay tribute to him is to make his dream come true by providing the means to enable the museum reactivated.

Toward that end, I'm hopeful that the enclosed article [see reproduction below] may be helpful. It is scheduled for the issue of Model Aviation, which will go to the printer at the end of May. It will be in most members' hands in the latter part of June.

We have about two weeks before committing the words to print, so there is an opportunity for correction, addition, or deletion. Therefore, please feel free to advise about any desired changes by May 25. Feel free also to add any personal message if you like. You can call collect at any time: 202-347-2751.

Please know that I intend to support your efforts any way I can to keep Russ' memory alive via the museum.

Sincerely,

*John Worth
Executive Director*

The following is the article John Worth referred to in the letter he sent to Mrs. Barrera. It ran in Model Aviation magazine's August 1979 issues on pages 70 and 71. Mrs. Barrera did not add any information to what John Worth wrote.

Friends of Russ Barrera Organize to Save Museum

One of the world's great (perhaps the greatest) model aircraft museums is in crisis. Russ Barrera had barely changed the location of his Model Aircraft Museum and Library from San Marcos in southern California to Morgan Hill in the northern part of the state when he was stricken with cancer. He died on May 8. The picture of health at the beginning of March this year, Russ deteriorated rapidly over the next two months.

While the move to Morgan Hill (site of great annual scale contests) was completed before Russ' troubles began, this was merely the first phase. The next step was to unpack and display everything in preparation for a grand opening. But Russ didn't get to that step – it awaits help from volunteers and funds to carry on where Russ left off.

He had bought the property and built a building to house the museum – 3, 200 square feet of floor space – and made the move from San Marcos. Some models are hung from the rafters, magazines and books are placed in racks, but much remains to be done. Display cases need to be constructed, as well as shelves, a small office, and other facilities. Signs need to be made, inventorying and cataloging needs to be completed, models need to be repaired. Utility bills for power, water, and phone need to be paid; insurance and security protection need to be provided.

The basic ingredient necessary to make Russ' lifetime of work visible and available to the world is money. The family (Russ' wife, Lorraine, and two daughters) is determined to carry out his plans as a memorial, assisted by friends who have agreed to serve on a volunteer board of modelers. But they need help and contributions are being solicited.

Until the legalities of fund transfer are worked out, AMA is receiving and holding contributions. Donations may be made payable to AMA – Barrera Museum Fund, Suit 400, 815 Fifteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Russ Barrera's museum is chock full of famous and special models and many more were earmarked for museum display in the near future; such as Carl Goldberg's original Free Flight Zipper and Bill Wisniewski's Control Line speed Pink Lady. The museum building has dozens of large cartons full of famous models and some are already hanging in view – Goldberg's

Sailplane, Elbert J. Weather's Pacificoaster and many more. Russ' collection covers the whole lifespan and spectrum of model aviation history.

But unless the means are provided to bring the museum alive for all to see, the years of effort to date may be wasted and destroyed by moths, rats, dust, and the ravages of suspended animation. Needed to preserve this tremendous time capsule of model aviation history is financial aid to supplement the hours of labor pledged by friends of Russ Barrera.

Every modeler can show appreciation for the need to not let this heritage be lost by offering a donation. Time is critical. The family has suffered much and needs to know that there is great support for the project, so that they can dedicate their time and effort to carrying on. Without a strong show of support, the drive and continuity could be stalled. That would be a tragedy and should not be allowed to happen. Your help can make sure it doesn't so that Russ Barrera's museum comes alive again as a memorial to him and as a living history of model aviation.

OWNERS

Lorraine Barrera; Patricia Rogers; Barbara Carnes

ADVISORY BOARD

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ADVISORS-AT-LARGE

Carl Goldberg; John Worth; Frank Zaic

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