

JAMES RONALD “RON” PALMQUIST, SR.
1930-2022

I remember first meeting Ron in person at one of my earliest Seacoast Division meetings that I had attended. Ron was a public figure in southern Maine by that time as he had served as a news anchor on WGAN-TV in Portland, ME, for parts of two decades. He had a silky smooth voice and conveyed a Walter Cronkite-type of authority as he reported news stories. If Ron said it, it had to be true. Until that Seacoast Division NMRA meeting, however, I had no idea that he was interested in railroads or model railroading. I soon learned how passionate he was about both.



As it turned out, when I first met Ron, he was serving the Division as a director and as the editor of its newsletter, The Switch Tower. One could not ask for a more talented and knowledgeable person to write a newsletter for model railroaders. Growing up in Chicago, he had become a C&NW railfan and remained so for the rest of his life. He travelled many miles railfanning and was immensely proud of his portfolio of rail photos. When his education and professional journalism career took him to Denver, he continued railfanning and expanded the prototypes he studied. He published many articles and photographs throughout his adult life.

Thus, when it came to editing The Switch Tower, Ron brought a global perspective to it. He would intersperse many current as well as historical items of the railroad industry with segments devoted to railroad modeling and the Division in particular. I just took a peek of the 1998 Fourth Quarter Switch Tower (which is available on the Division's website) to refresh my memory of his excellent work. Unlike today, the newsletter was printed and mailed to paid subscribers. It generally had only 4 pages. Besides editing contributed articles and news items, Ron had a quarterly column, "Along the R-O-W." That was for starters. Then he added random items of interest such as comments on train shows, both recent and to come, trivia questions and answers, comments on railroad stories from other publications, hobby shop news (sadly, not much of that these days), and flashbacks ("50 years ago").

Ron had started editing the newsletter in the late 1990s when he was asked to fill in for ailing Editor David Collinge. David was also the division president at the time for the recently rejuvenated Seacoast Division NMRA. Ron's last issue as editor of The Switch Tower was Vol. 15, 3rd Quarter, July 2008. Ron did not give up for lack of a solid reason, either. His computer crashed, wiping out his hard drive and his publishing program. Terry King stepped up as editor and he used Micro Soft Publisher, a much more capable software, from that point forward. Ron told us that he (aged 78) was not ready to learn how to use an entirely new and more complex publishing software. He continued as a member of the board of directors until the Annual Meeting on January 16, 2010. He still continued to submit articles and news and attended events over time.

The last time I saw him at a division event was at the Fall Event in Stratham, NH, on October 15, 2019. I saw him enter the rear of the room after the program had started and I looked forward to talking with him at the first break. Unfortunately, he had left the event by that time, and I never again saw him in person. But his kindness and generosity never stopped. During his later years, he donated many of his research materials, especially photos of prototype railroad scenes and equipment, to various entities and individuals. I was witness to his donation of slides and a table-top slide viewer to the 470 Railroad Club. He knew that I was a fan of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad and he shipped me several batches of research documents and images for my use. I know he did this for other railroad interested folks, too.

Ron Palmquist is a splendid example how railroad fans and modelers with various talents and motivations can combine in an organization like the Seacoast Division NMRA and make the "whole" much greater than the "parts." Hopefully, the division will continue to benefit from wonderful and talented people who are willing to step up to help other members attain greater enjoyment in our hobby. I have missed Ron's smooth voice and his kind and generous soul. Rest in peace, Ron.

Peter McKenney