

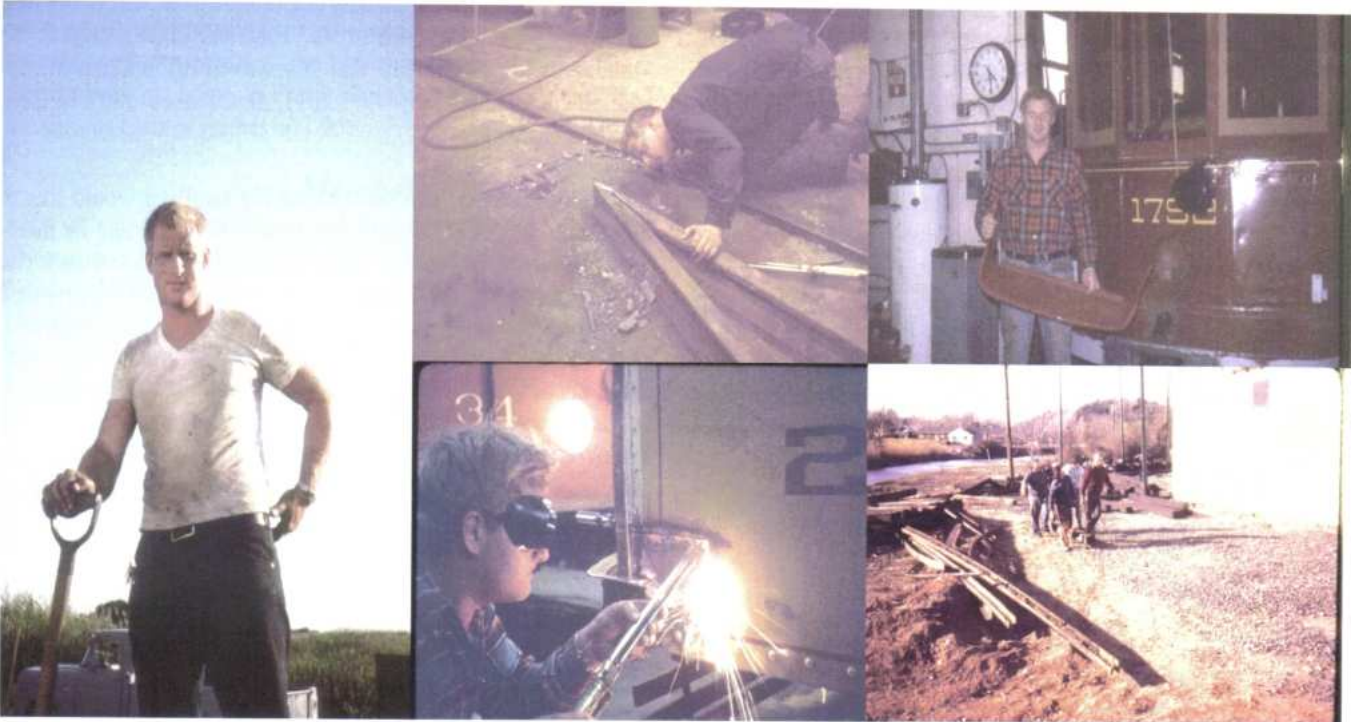
## Robert P. Rice Jr.

Bob Rice, a very colorful individual who had been a member since 1959, passed away earlier this year. Best known as a resourceful metal-worker with great physical strength and mental ingenuity, Bob leaves a legacy at the museum in the form of the custom-fabricated trackwork that forms the "ladder" for barns 6 and 7, as well as several trolley car restoration projects, including Atlanta 948 which debuted this year.

Bob had a knack for telling a story, and then another story, and then yet another, somehow weaving them together into an almost continuous narrative, liberally peppered with puns. He had a twist on almost every proper noun. "General Motors" became "General Murders," a manufacturer of "Diseasel Engines." Many of his colorful expressions exceed the tame editorial guidelines of this publication!

Bob retired as an engineer for Amtrak, where his middle son Charles currently works as a machinist. Chuck shares his reflections on his father's life and times, and favorite phrases:

My father, Bob Rice, was born July 5, 1941 in Southhampton, NY to Robert and Francis "Sis" Rice of King of Prussia, PA. Dad spent his younger years alternating between PA and Remsenburg, NY (on Long Island or "Wrong Island"), the family's summer home. During his teen years, his family moved to Remsenburg year round. With their home very close to Moriches Bay, and Dad's mother being a nationally renowned sailor, Dad picked up a love of sailing and boating at an early age.



Bob Rice at the museum, 1976-77. Top M: Laying out one of the homemade frogs for Barn 6 ladder. Top R: The details of what Bob was doing with 1792's step are lost in time. But time is still kept by that same wall clock in the same spot, 35 years later! Bottom M: Replacing corroded steel on car 2350. Bottom R: Finally, something Bob couldn't lift by himself! Tom Shade, Mike Scholl, Ken Rosen, and Bob schlep the frog into position near Barn 6. (All photos: K. Rosen)

Dad's mechanical aptitude also became evident at a very young age. When his mother enrolled him in kindergarten at age 3, he made it clear he didn't want to be there by removing the doorknob from the outside of the classroom door, briefly trapping the class inside.

As a youngster, he produced several "cabin cruisers" from old rowboats and small boats. He would build fiberglass cabins on them so they were fully enclosed and powered by others' discarded outboard engines and use them for his weekend excursions. He named them after famous liners, such as "Lusitania" and "Titanic," though none of his met similar fates that I know of. I remember my father telling me of sailing his SS class sloop in a hurricane for the fun of it.

When he became a standard sight around town on his latest creation, the local newspaper ran an article about it, including a picture of him and his homemade tiller steered go cart. It was made out of a wooden plank, a wagon front end, and a lawn mower engine mounted on a door hinge (allowing the weight of the engine to tighten the belt, acting as a clutch).

At the age of 4, Dad was allowed to go into the cab of a steam locomotive in the station, beginning a lifelong obsession of anything railroad. As a teen, Dad continued his antics. He appropriately played a mad scientist in a high school play. I also remember Dad telling me one way he would drive his older sister crazy. He would grab the bumper or rear fender of her very tired Morris Minor, lifting one wheel off the ground preventing her from getting to work on time. She would chase him away, but before she could get back in the car, he would do it again.

After high school in 1961, Dad joined the Army where he served in Taiwan, maintaining and repairing diesel generators. It was there he built his first electric "car" the "Volkswagen." It was a three wheeled, tiller steered contraption, that he used around town, much to the amusement and curiosity of the locals. He also built a few four-wheeled, flat-nosed electric pickup trucks, somewhat larger than a golf cart, which he called "Electroliners," and planned on selling there. All were painted with the Pennsylvania Railroad style "whiskers" on the body.

After his time in the service, he worked at a few other companies that tried, and failed, to sell electric cars. One of them was Sebring Vanguard, that produced the wedge shaped Citicar (I think we can all guess Dad's twist on this one). He also worked at a company in Detroit that converted AMC vehicles to electric. Dad was also a participant in the 1970 Tour de Sol.

In 1973, Dad married my mother, Zoe (Wendy). At about that time, some of you older members may remember my parents living on the museum property, in the 1954 International schoolbus he converted into a camper/mobile home.



Bob's locomotives - GG-1 #4914, July 1980 (Photo: Bob Gayer); AEM-7AC ca. 2003 (Photo: Rice Family)

In 1974, Dad began his railroad career on the Penn Central as a ticket agent. In 1977 my older brother Ken was born. I (Charles/Chuck) was born in 1979, and my younger brother, Eric, in 1980. On the railroad, Dad was promoted to an electrician's position, a foreman, a fireman and finally to Locomotive Engineer on Conrail ("Clownrail") in 1985. He soon went to Amtrak ("Slamtrak," "Anthrax," "Scamtrak," and "Shamtrak") where he operated a wide variety of locomotives and equipment: AEM7 "Meatballs," HHP-8 "Bananas," and Amcoaches ("Amroaches").

I do know that he was frequently given the worst equipment of the particular day (usually featuring tired F-7's and the white Pullman cars) on Shoreline East jobs, because he rarely, if ever, complained about faulty equipment. "Goes like hell, don't touch a thing!" he'd enthusiastically tell the mechanical department. I think he loved the challenge.

He was well known for his ability to make trackside repairs. I remember a story I heard at work where his AEM-7 had hit something, breaking off the brake pipe angle cock (this is the railroad jargon for an isolating valve) on the front of the engine. Dad repaired it with a large stick jammed into the open pipe end that held the air pressure in the brake pipe (110 psi) until it was repaired.

Dad prided himself on his train making up, and being on time (though as many of you may know, he was rarely on time for anything else), and acquired the nickname "Rocketman." He took a particular fondness to the AEM-7 (especially the DC model) locomotive. He also enjoyed the operating the Acela ("Decela"). He was well known for his colorful radio transactions that he constantly used such as "Clear for takeoff." Or he would refer to which track he was "landing" on. "Off like a herd of turtles/turd of hurdles" depending on his mood. Metro North was always lovingly referred to as "Mafia North." The Shoreline dispatcher was "Surefine dispatcher."

During the last 7 or 8 years of his employment, he commuted to work in his converted electric VW Rabbit and Jetta. He would charge the car at work claiming "the railroad has plenty of electricity, they won't miss any." He retired in 2005. Several weeks before his retirement, his Road Foreman told him he was not to use some of his more offensive (and perhaps unmentionable) terms and city nicknames any more on the radio. I guess someone lost their sense of humor after two decades of it.

Dad was known for his size and feats of physical strength too. At 6'5" and usually around 300 lbs.(at least during my lifetime), he was a big man. I remember that whenever he bought a new watch, it would get its standard resizing. With one end in a vise, he would heat the plastic watchband with a torch and stretch it to fit his wrist. I remember his toenail grooming with diagonal cutters, a drill, and a 5" sanding disk. I'm not kidding.

I've heard the story of him singlehandedly pulling (or pushing) a Budd RDC ("Dudd car") to move it, in the shop, and turning F-40 locomotives on the now long removed powered turntable in New Haven by himself, by hand. He literally had a "hands on" approach to removing his VW Beetle engines - lifting them out of the car, by hand of course, and setting them on a 55 gallon drum to work on them. As a small boy, I remember helping Dad change a tire one of his many "Jokeswagon" Beetles in a similar fashion. He would take 4 lug bolts out. As I loosened the fifth one he would grab the fender, lifting the offending corner of the car, while I removed the last lug bolt and that tire. He held the car up while I put the spare tire and one lug back on.

After his retirement, he frequently traveled to different electric vehicle events and became even more active in the promotion of anything to do with EV's. He converted 7 or 8 cars to electric, mostly for other people at his home in Killingworth. In 2005 he was featured, along with his electric Rabbit, in a *New Haven Register* article, and in 2008, in the *Hartford Courant* with his electric Jetta. He was seen on CPTV talking about his obsession with anything electric. He also received a lifetime achievement award from the New England Electric Auto Association.

On Oct. 12th, 2010, Dad suffered a brain stem stroke which left him very debilitated and unable to care for himself. He put up a good fight in physical therapy for months, but was never able overcome the effects of the stroke. He later caught a staph infection at the rehab facility that his weakened immune system couldn't beat. On May 13th, 2011, Dad passed away at Connecticut Hospice.

In closing, on behalf of myself and my family, I would like to thank the Branford / Shore Line Trolley Museum and its members for their kindness and recognition of my father. Thank you for the decades of enjoyment and enrichment that you provided to his life.

Charles Rice

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