

Ship Models that Ought to be Built

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The following article which appeared in the Nautical Research Journal and Ship Modeler's Shop Notes is reprinted here to give guidance to builders who desire to construct accurate and representative ship models. This material is as applicable now as when it was first written. The opinions expressed here are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Nautical Research Guild.

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In an earlier article I expressed some opinions on ship models that ought not be built. Many readers of this journal did not agree with me and expressed their disagreements. I must say I have not been impressed by the reasons given for disagreement for I cannot yet understand why a modeler would want to build a model that he knows is not the ship it is supposed to be.

On the other hand I know too well that accurate, or reasonably accurate, plans of some very interesting craft are not easily found. However, there are a huge number of plans in existence and I am sure that most will agree with me if I say that among these are certainly many possibilities for very valuable and informative models. Now, I admit I have an ulterior motive in bringing up this subject. I recently asked our long-suffering editor (Merritt Edson) to ascertain what ships interested model builders in the Guild so that some plan could be assembled for the pages of the Journal. If you will look in back numbers you will note how few suggestions have been received. Why is this? I suspect it may partly be accounted for by my supposition that many modelers are at a loss to know what is in any way possible, and what is readily available. And I am also aware that it is often very difficult to decide what you want to build next and final judgment is often reached only after seeing a plan or model of a boat or vessel that you had never heard about before.

In looking over various collections of ship models, private or institutional, it is very apparent that square-rigged ships are of prime interest. Where there are ship models there are usually clippers. Alas - too often they are the same ships - Flying Cloud, Sea Witch and James Baines - even when beautifully modeled. It is easy to say that there are other plans than of these ships, but anyone interested knows that in nearly all available plans of clippers there is far too little detail and, upon research being made, it is found that clippers appear to be one damned mystery after another.

One of the most complete plans of clipper ships is the set showing the Great Republic which are sometimes turned up in pamphlet form and which also appear in Paris Souvenirs de Marine. The Web book-Plans of Wooden Ships

shows lines and sail plans of many clippers out of the Webb yard. These plans, by the way, are not the original building plans but were drawn from mold-loft offsets and spar dimensions in most cases, long after the ships had died. Still, they are not useless; for example, there are lines and sail plans of the clippers Comet and Young America-and in the Smithsonian there are builder's decorative half-models showing the important features of the deck layout. Some modelers have already discovered this but I do not think it is generally known for there are still very few models of these two clippers.

In past years I have taken off the lines of many half-models of clipper ships but I know of none that show enough to permit a model to be built without long and difficult research. One headache is that the scaled dimensions of many clipper ship models cannot be adjusted to the recorded custom-house dimensions. And in all cases there will have to be a lot of reconstruction in rigging and construction details. I found the takeoff of the Webb clipper Challenge in England which shows the lines to outside of plank and the figurehead-but no deck layout and as yet I know of none. If anyone does have the deck layout then we might go to town on this ship for Plans of Wooden Ships shows spars. If you feel you want to do a clipper ship it seems to me that disappointment would be avoided more readily if you accepted a decorative half-model as your objective; in some cases you might get a reasonably accurate result from existing builder's model and paintings of individual ships. [After this was written, Howard I. Chapelle developed Challenge's deck plans from Duncan Maclean's article in the Atlas of Boston during 1851.)

There are very few packet ship models-which seems to me to be a great pity for they were very interesting ships historically, technically, and in performance. The reason why few models of this class of ship have been made is readily explained - there are very few plans and none very complete. Webb published a few plans In Wooden Ships and I think - but cannot prove-that some of these plans were copied from original building drawings. Also, in the library of Webb Institute of Naval Architecture there is more information

- the yard's offset books for example. With these a skilled modeler or marine draftsman might reconstruct the lines of some of Eckford's packets so that at least the hull lines could be represented accurately. There are a few sketches of packet ship details in the Webb material and the heads of two packets are shown in McKay's old book on shipbuilding. There are, of course, some paintings also. A few half-models exist - one at least in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, one at Mystic and one in the Maryland Historical Society rooms. There are probably others that I have not seen as I have never attempted an exhaustive search for material on this class of ships. There are a few plans of Cope's Philadelphia packets in the Lenthall Collection, Franklin Institute, Philadelphia but only lines and sail plans as far as I know.

I shall not take up much space with sailing men-of-war for there are now a great many available plans which are reasonably accurate. Having made some myself I can say that every attempt was made to obtain as accurate information as the records and situation permit. I took pains to list, on my plans, the reconstruction done. As to this, while reconstruction was done on the basis of such details in similar ships, or in Royal Navy plans of even date, it does not follow that this is accurate, for at every date and in every type there is the possibility of variations. Having taken great effort to show small working service craft it has been some what of a disappointment to see how little interest these have aroused in model builders. Most model collections show the usual Constitution, a Raleigh, a Wasp or Argus, or a Constellation, but rarely one of the many other interesting vessels. One of the difficulties in navy ship models is that many sailing men-of-war had long lives and were changed somewhat on almost every commissioning; so for a single ship there may be a number of deck plans and spar dimensions representing a ship at some period in her life. Since it is rare to find a ship completely detailed in a single period it is very easy to end up with a set of plans showing a ship in a number of periods from which one can only reconstruct her at a fixed date on the basis of the "mostest" shown. But in spite of the difficulties in this field I think there ought to be some models of the service craft and small men-of-

war at various periods in American history and less emphasis on Constitution and one or two other ships.

Steam men-of-war are sadly neglected it seems to me. The National Archives has a huge quantity of very interesting ship plans in varying stages of detail and of the whole range in date from the early naval steamers to 1900 or thereabouts. Recently I saw plans of an Eckford Steam Battery, various designs for "Sea Steamers" in the late 1830's and the interesting Fulton (2nd) as well as some plans of the iron Michigan and the Steers' designed Niagara. There are plans of curiosities like Union and there are, of course, a huge number of plans of Civil War steamers: Kearsarge, Hartford, Wabash, Merrimack, 90-day gunboats, monitors, double-enders, more monitors and hundreds of very curious designs, proposals and general details. Recently Earle Goeghagen and I explored the files and found a number of plans of Confederate rams and river iron-clads-some well detailed and some not. The lines of the Collin's liner Adriatic turned up. In the post Civil War period there were plans of a number of interesting and startling experimental vessels and proposals. The Navy files in the Archives also contain a very complete lot of ships' boat plans and details; some of these would make very attractive models. The one drawback to this great source is that the index is in very poor shape and so it is necessary to visit the Archives in person and spend much time in search to accomplish a relatively satisfactory research on a ship of any fixed period. But, in spite of this, the source is invaluable and available in some way to all, either through personal visit or through the mails. With this huge source of material there is little excuse for us not having some attractive and useful models showing the development of American steamships. I have found a set of lines of a steam auxiliary packet ship, a steam whaler bark rigged, a trading schooner of 1880, a number of plans of lightships and other curiosities in this extraordinary gold-mine of marine information.

In New England at least, there are many models of fishermen, the well-known Gloucestermen. It is a little unfortunate, I think, that the great majority of recent models of fishermen have been of the so called "racing fishermen" which were hardly representative. But this came about through the availability of plans of racers and the publicity the vessels received. The research on fishing schooners has been carried on by many and it is to be hoped that the results will eventually be published for then it would be possible for modelers to build some typical vessels of this class for such areas as New England, New York, New Jersey, the Chesapeake Bay, the Pacific Coast, and the Gulf of Mexico.

Very few models seem to exist on exploration vessels, yet there is some plan material available on Bear, Roosevelt and other well known ships. Old English exploration ships have not been fully searched for but there are at least a few plans in the National Maritime Museum in London and undoubtedly there are plans of ships after 1850 in the Admiralty files. Some books on Arctic exploration show plans of ships. The Fram and one or two others may be found in these sources. A few plans are in the National Archives but as far as I know not of a complete ship. The Bear's plans are in the hands of the Coast Guard. [The Naval Division, Smithsonian Institution, has an excellent series of plans showing the Bear as she appeared in the 1890's. The plans were produced for use in constructing a scale model of this vessel.]

I have recently heard that a few members are interested in models of American small fishing and trading craft. I hope this is followed up for it is a field well suited to local interest and there is a raft of material available. I think the plans of scow schooners in the Historic American Merchant Marine Survey (Department of Water Transportation, Smithsonian Institution hold this collection) would be very useful and the collection also contains many photos. As hard as it may be to believe, the scow schooner and sloop make most attractive models and are perhaps less difficult for the inexperienced modeler than most types of sailing vessel. There are books on small types

including bugeyes. The huge variety of small boat types in America makes a fascinating field and many of the types would make very attractive and historically valuable models. Except for the collection in the Smithsonian and the special one in the Providence Public library, there appear to be no special collections of small boat type models in the United States. This classification of model can be expanded - and should be - to include models of the early power-boats used in shore fishing and coastal trade for these are disappearing in many areas. Incidentally, models of bootleggers would have been as historically valuable as would models of Civil War blockade-runners or pirate ships. Plans of "booties" are hard to come by but I think a little effort might eventually produce a few at least.

Whaling ship models have been quite popular and still seem to have appeal to model builders I do not know of any completely accurate plan, but there are many half-models, pictures and other source materials. To my mind the whaler is a difficult ship to model and the whaling schooner related in model to the old Grand Banker "salt fisherman" is an easier job with equal appeal. A plan of one of these is in Grimwood's book *American Ship Models and How to Build Them*.

I shall not attempt to make much of river steamer models-I know too little about them. There is quite an article on these steamers in an old *Transactions of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers*, by Ward, a noted builder, and the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, has many plans of river vessels after 1900. I am too uninformed on plan sources for other types of special steamships to offer suggestions.

So far I have dealt only with ships and boats of basic American interest. I know there are many model builders who are interested in Pre-American craft or in special types of early sailing men-of-war. The only European source with which I can claim any real personal knowledge is the Collection of Admiralty Draughts in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, England. In this there are plans as far back as circa 1674 or 5, but

with the bulk of the material between 1727 and 1835. There are plans in varying degree of completeness of merchant ships 1764-1780, of galley-ships 1675-1745, frigates 1711-1835, cutters 1757-1830, luggers 1794-1815, bomb ketches 1727-1750 (apparently the later bombs were all ship rigged from 1757 on), French, Spanish, Italian, Danish, Russian, Swedish, Dutch and American prize ships are rather numerous. In passing, I must say our English counterparts have similar omissions in models that ought to be built - there is no end of models of Victory, but so far as I could learn no model - and no interest I guess - in Nelson's first command, a Bermudian built brig named Badger. Now there are plans of the Badger in the National Maritime Museum and what is more, these plans are remarkably complete giving lines, inboard profile, deck and platforms, spar dimensions and - believe it or not - rather complete specifications. To my mind the Badger's plans are unique and in addition, the brig is too, for the plans show she had a hogged keel. I cannot understand why models of this ship have not been made as the plan could have been readily procured - one would have supposed that some modeler interested in Nelson would have tried for his first ship as well as his last. But, after all, equally interesting models of American interest are just as strangely neglected. Thus, we have no model collection showing the development of steamers comparable to the British Science Museum at London, yet I think the plan material is readily available. Comparisons are odious I know, but our British friends have done much more in models of small craft types than we have.

There is not space to continue on the subject, but enough has been said, I hope, to encourage someone to build a model of something beside a pure reconstruction based on no more than a vague idea and perhaps, a few doubtful dimensions. If there is not good enough dope for a clipper ship, there are plenty of sources for fine models of craft of historical, romantic, technical or local interests. There are enough Flying Clouds, Constitutions, racing fishermen, and imaginary galleons God knows, and there is surely some type of boat or vessel that will interest a modeler that has not yet been modeled. But, if you are not interested in accurate models and desire to build

stuff of a level of truthfulness of a Hollywood movie "Pirate Ship" or "Spanish Galleon" forget I brought the matter up.

About the Nautical Research Guild

Founded in 1948, the Nautical Research Guild (NRG) is an IRS 501(c)(3) approved nonprofit educational organization with an international membership of historians, ship model makers, artists and laypersons with a common interest in the history, beauty and technical sophistication of ships and their models.

The NRG publishes the quarterly Nautical Research Journal, a quarterly magazine whose articles span the broad spectrum of topics in the linked disciplines of nautical research and ship model building. The NRG also holds an annual conference and operates the Model Ship World online community.

For more information about the Nautical Research Guild, including membership options, visit <http://www.thenrg.org>.

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Model Ship World is the world's largest ship modeler's forum with over 32,000 members. The forum hosts over 900 scratch build logs and over 2,400 kit build logs.

Free to join, the forum has an active community of modelers across all skill levels. With over half a million posts in more than 15,000 topics, Model Ship World is an incredible resource for any modeler.

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