

Modeling, not just for kids

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The old saw that says the only difference between men and boys is the size of their toys doesn't hold true when it comes to boats. Like many I built models growing up, some from kits, some pretty crude from scrap wood which had unique sailing characteristics, provided they floated long enough to demonstrate them. My boats got bigger as I got older. My first “real” boat was a 32' very used, former charter boat which also served as my home for a couple of years. Over the years my boats have gotten progressively smaller, but no less enjoyable.

The last boat I built is but 30 *inches* long. The building cost was negligible as I used small pieces of wood left over from other projects and the only expense was for glue and a few fittings that I couldn't make myself. Of course we're talking about modeling. Modeling has been a part of boating since the first boat was launched and possibly even before that.

Archaeologists have discovered ship and boat models from ancient times throughout the world. These early models most likely had religious significance and were used for blessings or burial votives. Probably as now some served as art items or toys. These artifacts provide us with valuable information regarding historic seafaring technology and a look into past maritime sociological and economic importance.

Before naval forces could rule the seas ships had to be built and models were the way to show

royalties and admiralties what they were investing in. The models would not only help with financing but more importantly, with their construction.

Sailors held captive for years in prisons or on long voyages sought relief from boredom by cleverly building model ships out of any material at hand: bone, ivory, human hair. Some of these models were amazingly intricate and a commercial market developed for them as an art form.

I've always been impressed with ships in a bottle, partly because of the amount of skill involved in making them so small, and partly because I couldn't imagine the amount of time and patience required. I saw one of Old Ironsides that was so small it had to be viewed with a magnifying glass! As I gazed in wonder, I muttered something about "can you imagine taking that much time to build something that tiny?" The man standing next to me said it was his model. I told him that it was a very nice one.

We've all seen half hull models decorating the walls of offices and museums. Before there were CAD programs or even drawing boards half hull models were used to design, sell and then construct a boat. Modern day models still serve a purpose, from tank testing super tankers and high end racing yachts, to what really benefits us small boat builders, seeing how all the parts go together and what they'll look like when they are assembled.

A few years ago I got the boat building bug after reading a *Wooden Boat* article featuring sharpies showing off their simple, clean lines and mentioning how easy they are to build. After some research I ordered plans for the 19' Ohio Sharpie from Reuel Parker. Just as I was about to start the next issue of *Wooden Boat* arrived with a section on building the Peace Canoe, a weekend project (oh, sure!) Since it was plywood over frames much like the sharpie, I decided to build it as a warm up. First, I built a model as practice for the practice boat and to see if bending plywood panels over attached seats would really end up looking like a canoe. Well it did, so I built the full sized one. It took a bit more than a weekend but the extra time was spent coating it with xynole-polyester and epoxy like the sharpie called for (more practice.) So now I had a battleship of a canoe, actually more of a pirogue, and was ready for the sharpie build.

Parker's plans didn't have step by step instructions, not sure how many plans do, so building a model was almost essential. It is much better to trash a 12" piece of scrap wood rather than 12' of expensive lumber. The model helps you figure how when to install parts, like it sure would have been easier to put that thwart in if the deck wasn't in the way! And to see how paint schemes (black hull or white) and trim will look. I experimented by adding a dog house not called for in the plans (it really would provide shelter for our dogs) to see if it would fit the design. After seeing it on the model I think it would if it were built a little shorter and had wood trim along the top edge.

I never expected the building process to be so enjoyable. I found myself referencing the model often and while it helped prevent some missteps I found many other ones to make. But that didn't dampen my enthusiasm, for when the sharpie left the shop I was on the Internet and thumbing through old boating magazines and design books searching for just the right next build.

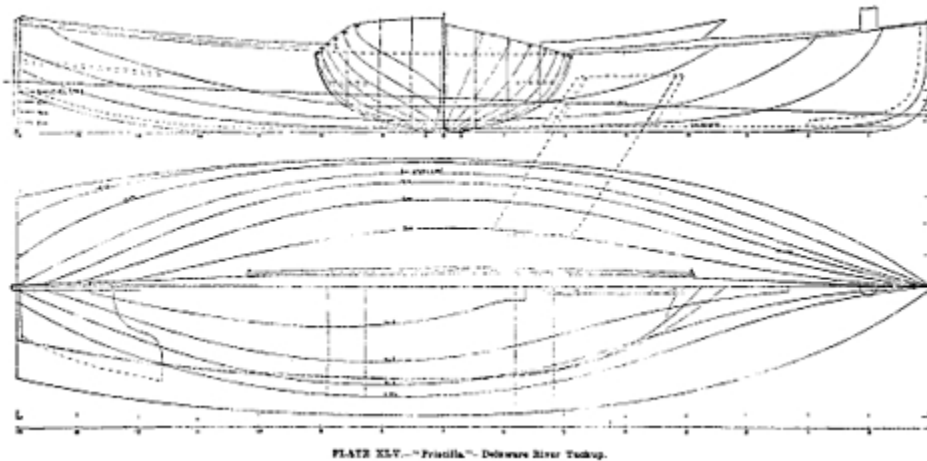


PLATE XLV.—Priscilla—Delaware River Tuckup.

It was in WP Stephens *Canoe and Boat Building*, a somewhat crude reprint of an 1898 Forest and Stream publication, that I stumbled upon the line drawings for *Priscilla*. I loved her lines and it was the size boat I was thinking about. She was a Delaware River Tuckup, a boat I'd never heard of. We live a few miles from the Delaware River so the local historic aspect added to the appeal. Through the wonders of the internet (how did we ever survive without it?) and a few clicks of the mouse I had pages of information on the design. A few more mouse clicks and I was in contact with someone that had built and researched them.

The lapstrake construction and especially the “tucked up” stern will make this design much more difficult to build than the sharpie. That some have called it an insane design due to her overpowering sail plan and tendency to capsize or otherwise abuse her crew would make this a challenge to sail as well. Undeterred, I ordered the plans and began lofting from Priscilla's lines and offsets as published in Stephens' book.

One great thing about northern winters is that they give you the *opportunity* to devote time to indoor activities such as modeling. I braved the cold of my workshop to quickly rip some wood to size and began a 2” scale model. While I had calculated the optimum plank widths using Iain Oughtred's formula, the reality of getting these small pieces of wood to fit, and stay glued in place, plus dreading going to that cold shop to recut the planks. I have to admit that the hull got done but not very well. It was a learning process, and I will learn to do it better full scale.



It's always fascinating to see the form of a boat take shape. Each stage of construction has its own

challenges and rewards. In scratch modeling the challenges usually revolve around finding or making a part or fitting that fits the scale. I don't have any metal working equipment so I really had to improvise on the fittings. Some, like the miniature blocks and turnbuckle, I ordered from a hobby shop, but for the rest it was cutting thin pieces of brass, snipping parts of safety pins, even using some PVC pipe. Though the purpose of the model is practice for the real thing you can't resist throwing some paint and varnish on to see what she could look like.

The rigging was fairly simple since she only has one stay and a couple of halyards. But it was enough to convince me that I don't need to ever consider rigging a model of a tall ship. My wife kindly offered to sew the sail out some muslin she had. I added a few reef points, bent it on, hoisted it with the little halyards and that about finished her. The fact that it seems like any little breeze would knock her off her stand gives me an idea of her sailing stability.

There is a small problem. It's still snowing as I write this and that stupid groundhog says we have another 6 weeks of winter. Is that enough time to do another model? I'm thinking radio control for the next one with servos and transmitters. Now we're talking toys!

