

Skipper's Corner

Mastering Sticks and Strings Masterpieces

*By Joe Miller
WSMS Skipper*

The October WSMS meeting heard yet another great presentation, from prior skipper Gene Larson, a ship model builder with nationally recognized accomplishments. He is presently building a true plank-on-frame model of the Chesapeake sloop. He is using a sandwich technique in which frame blanks (made of cherry) are supported by blocks of basswood assuring proper room and space. After discussing the issues of

using a plan in which the frames are not necessarily in the places needed, and potentially incorrect lines in certain parts of the hull, he described his method of developing frame shapes. This begins with setting up frame blanks slightly larger than the desired frame. Each frame is composed of futtock pieces sistered so that joints in one layer of pieces would fall on the middle of a futtock on the other layer, providing strength throughout. Also, the futtock pieces are sized so that only the minimal portion of end grain would be on a surface to be shaped (it is much more difficult to sand against the end grain than with the grain). The frames are also notched to maintain athwartship alignment. The frames are also spaced so that forward of the midship frame (the frame in which lines tangent to the surface of the ship are essentially exactly parallel) have the frame body forward of the plan frame outline, and those aft of the midships frame aft of the plan frame outline. (This permits beveling of the outside of the frames in the appropriate forward and aft directions.) Gene then inserted the above-mentioned bass wood blocks between the frames, without gluing the frames either to the blocks or to the keelson defining the midlines of the frames.

Gene demonstrated the remarkable tightness with which the frames are held in place simply by friction. Once these athwart frame blanks were in place, standard shaping methods for solid wood hulls are used to obtain the final outside shape of the hull. This obtains the correct external bevels of the frames. The inside bevels are then obtained on a frame-by-frame basis. The frames

**Next Meeting
Tuesday, November 9, 2004
At 8 P.M.
At
Bethesda Naval Medical Center**

This will be a "Show and Tell" meeting.

Bethesda Naval Medical Center is located on left side of Wisconsin Boulevard approximately one mile inside of the beltway. It is across the street from the National Institutes of Health. After going through the guard gate, take the first right and proceed to the first street on your left. Turn left and make an immediate right into the outpatient garage. Proceed to the second floor, and take the skyway to the hospital. A member will meet you as you enter.

Please be sure that all persons in your vehicle have photo identification. Vehicles may be searched by the Marine Guard contingent before entering the grounds, so try to leave extra time before the meeting.

can be removed from the “jig” at any time and re-inserted, permitting modification with complete confidence that correct registration has been maintained.



Side view of framing "jig"

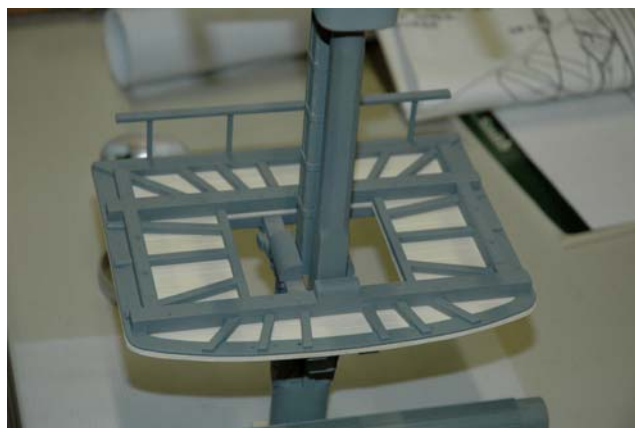
After frame shaping has been accomplished, the frames are attached to a keel (or keelson if the external keel is to be added later, a technique that departs from actual practice but is much easier to do than rabbeting, and is used widely by many of the world’s best modelers). The cant frames forward (and aft if so needed) are shaped and installed. From then on the deck clamps and related internal stiffeners are installed and the ship is ready for application of external planking.



Inserting shaped frame into jig

Gene also discussed production of dimensional wood strips for planking and decking, and made the point that it is very difficult to saw wood strips to the exacting tolerances needed for model shipbuilding, and that some passes

through a thickness sander are almost inevitably necessary. He showed some of the pear strips he has prepared for planking later. He intends to plank with the frames still in the “sandwich” jig described above - certainly he will be very careful no glue gets between the planks, frames and the basswood support blocks. (Incidentally, Gene pointed out that using balsa for the blocks is unsatisfactory – it is not strong enough for the purpose.)



Joel Labow's USS *Constitution* fighting top master

Then one of our other master builders, Joel Labow showed us his latest masterpiece work in progress, a fighting top from the USS *Constitution*. As with his deck fragment from HMS Diana, this work of art is to 3/8th inch to the foot (1/32 scale), and everything is true to the prototype. This is being prepared as a master for polyurethane casting to allow mass production of this item as a kit for production of a diorama or related application. The components include the complete top with all its timbers, the upper portion of the mast and lower topmast with the overlap between the two, and the fittings associated with these. Joel, using his knowledge of Naval armaments, will include small howitzers and other suitable equipment. Since this and his quarter deck models are intended for many kinds of builders, including miniaturists (Joel's models are ideal for 54 mm figure diorama production.) To give an idea of the degree of detail involved, each piece of the complex rigging itself has been reproduced with cyanoacrylate-stiffened line and will be cast in plastic for builders who are more interested in using the fighting top as a diorama.

Once again Joel's exacting attention to detail and superb craftsmanship have been combined to make a great model. We kiddingly have suggested that he will end up with enough such stations to make up a complete ship... ! The finished product will probably be "ready by Christmas", from Meteor Products.

Yours truly then put in an unashamed plug for the Nautical Research Guild annual meeting, and especially for the goodies I obtained at the Maine meeting, including the several books I obtained up there. As I mentioned in the last Skipper's Corner, a lot of information is coming out about French ship models and modeling, especially in the "sticks and strings" categories. Pier Books appears to have risen to the top in supporting this market, with some very impressive French publications translated into English.

Steel Navy Meeting

The Steel Navy special interest group meets the last Saturday of the month in one of the members' homes. The group focuses largely on post-*Monitor* powered ships, with particular interest in steel hulled warships, though merchants and passenger liners are also fair game. Models may be wood, plastic, resin, card stock, metal or "virtual" (i.e., computer generated). Discussions of models, modeling techniques, research and reference material are always lively, with virtually everyone taking home some new ideas to use on their own models

The next meeting is being offset by one week to allow for the Thanksgiving holiday, and is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, December 4 at 10 AM. The location is to be determined at this time. For information, please contact Vince (703) 345-8644 (daytime) or by email at vincent.mccullough@ngc.com.

WSMS Officers

The following individuals currently serve on the WSMS "Bridge"

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USS *Perch*, ca 1936 -1937. US Naval Historical Center photograph