

AMERICA...the Exquisite



The Most Detailed Model of the SS AMERICA Ever Created

by Bill Lee

There has never been, to my knowledge, a model constructed of the SS AMERICA that shows such fine and accurate detail as the one depicted above. This forty-five inch-long model was crafted by **Dan Pariser**, model maker extraordinaire and the current Conservator of Ship Models at the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City.

Dan started building wooden ship models in 1986. His creations range from racing yachts to ocean liners. He has also restored antique models including thirty ship models from the collection of Franklin D. Roosevelt.



In November of 2009, Dan contacted me seeking drawings, photos and other detail information in order to create a model of the SS AMERICA. He had been told that I possessed more information about the ship than he could possibly find anywhere else. I modestly ignored that flattering (but accurate!) referral and over the next twelve months provided him with dozens of drawings, photos and insights from a shipbuilder's perspective.

In addition to answering numerous questions he raised about some really obscure details, I also thoroughly enjoyed reviewing progress photos of his work and providing comments and suggestions for his consideration. To be sure, the creative work on this model was his and his alone. All I did was provide suitable images, both pictorial and in word-descriptive form for him to utilize. He kept thanking me. I kept saying what other 'amerifans' already know: "That's my job, that's what I do."

When Dan was done, after a full year of elapsed time and approximately 1,300 hours of work, the best word to describe the results is *EXQUISITE*. According to Dan, that estimate does not include an approximately equal number of hours spent planning, studying drawings and photographs, and discussing details. Here's a view of one of the passenger decks, with a dime resting next to some miniature deck chairs to illustrate the model's delicate workmanship.



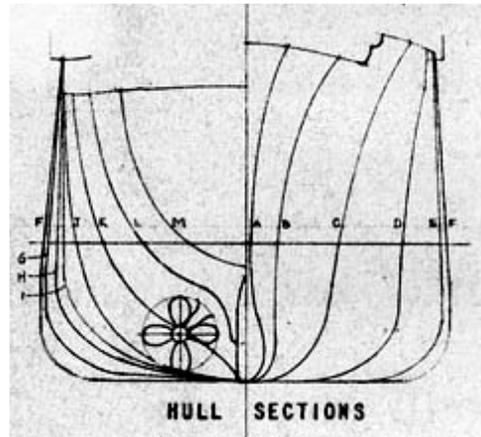
One of the more fascinating details that Dan created, to a scale of 1/16th inch equals one foot was the staggered strakes of hull plating and every porthole, using vintage drawings and photographs. I don't believe that has ever been attempted or accomplished before for a model of the AMERICA. And probably not for many other ships, either. Other examples abound; like his treatment of the utility boats nestled forward, port and starboard, and even the ship's nameboard.

What is equally intriguing is the lack of knowledge about the person who commissioned this model through a third party. Neither Dan nor I know his/her name, or what prior connection, if any, the model's patron may have had with the SS AMERICA. The individual who commissioned this model specified that it be representative of how the vessel appeared around 1950. Perhaps he or she was a passenger whose life was materially changed by passage in this ocean liner. I doubt we'll ever know...



Equally fascinating, at least for anyone who has ever created model ships, are some of the proven techniques that Dan Pariser employs. For example, he created the hull using rough-cut 'lifts' (i.e., thin layers) of basswood, which is a very stable wood and much favored by model makers.

To prevent future cracking of the hull, these lifts were hollowed out. The exterior of the hull was shaped to 'station' templates which Dan created, based on vintage prints of the AMERICA's hull lines.



The superstructures were also created using basswood, but sheathed with styrene plastic. The large windows on both sides of the Promenade Deck were photo-etched brass pieces produced by a friend of Dan's. The railings and doors were also photo-etched materials obtained from one of several suppliers of such things. But the funnels, masts, cargo booms, etc. were all scratch-built by Dan, whose innovative manufacturing techniques included using sections of plastic plumbing pipe as part of the streamlined funnels.



Many of the fittings were obtained from model supply firms that build such things to scale. However, what was commercially available did not always satisfy Dan's drive for accuracy. The 'store-bought' lifeboats were modified by adding tiny plastic rudders, and the canvas covers on all the boats were represented by paper meticulously cut to properly represent the canvas 'tie-downs'.

Although he did not permanently include scale-model human figures, Dan did include a few, here and there; probably just for the fun of it. The result was some very neat photos which further illustrate the attention to detail which he included in this model, right down to the teak cap rails, life rings, ladders and representative planks on the miniature vessel's weather decks.



Each time I look at another of the photos kindly provided to me by Dan, I marvel at his skill. Here are a few more examples. Additional words are just not necessary to describe..

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