

# Fishermen's Sailing Models

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RECREATION in the lives of the inhabitants of the small fishing villages during the nineteenth century and through the early part of the twentieth was, it may be said, a scarce commodity. Therefore, it is not too surprising that the sea, being the source of their livelihood, also gave them their pleasure as a place upon which to sail cleverly built and rigged sailing models.

During the long winter months, many a fishhouse and kitchen, too, was the scene of activity in miniature shipbuilding.

With the advent of spring, after the blustery winter winds had subsided, the fishermen, to the delight of an enthusiastic audience on the bank, would on a Sunday afternoon and national holidays gather all afloat in skiffs and punts. The tiny craft, usually two- and three-masted schooners or sloop rigged, with sails nicely trimmed for the prevailing wind, would at the sound of a shot be off on an exciting course with their owners rowing in pursuit.

Occasionally, a particularly nasty gust would scatter the fleet, dispersing them to every point of the compass. At such a time as this a simple solution was to have each runaway captured and the race begun anew.

The last race the writer can recall took place in the late 1930's, and all contesting were two-masted schooner rigs. And if the writer's recollection serves him properly, the pursuers were all men who since have undoubtedly passed away or become unable to engage in such a strenuous pastime.

A fine example of this bygone era is

a sloop model, built sometime between 1900 and 1903, now in the writer's possession. Received as a gift from its builder a few summers ago, it is a treasured reminder of the craftsmanship and patience that is evident in its construction.

The builder told the story of the construction of the model as we put it upon a wheelbarrow. Pointing to a house just a few rods down the road, that had been his boyhood home, he related that during one winter, fifty years before, upon agreement with a fellow fisherman to race the coming summer, he began building the sloop. Unfortunately, neither thought to discuss size. During the winter it was the builder's habit to go to his mother's home to build and bank her fire for the night and he utilized this time to work upon the model. As spring approached, the sloop neared completion and it was at this time discovered that his model outclassed the prospective competitor by several feet! Generally speaking, the average model was carved from a solid block and usually was from three to four feet in length. Our model measures six feet seven and one-half inches in length on deck with a beam of twenty-three inches! The mast height is seven feet seven inches above the deck. All in all, this was about twice the dimensions of its sailing mate. A few additional dimensions are worthy of note in regard to sail area, the gaff sail being five feet one inch at the foot, three feet ten inches on the luff, having a twenty-five-inch head with a six-foot-six-inch leech. This sail is made up of eleven cloths, each four inches wide. The jib has a four-foot-ten-and-one-half-inch luff, twenty-one-inch foot

and a four-foot-six-inch leech. The flying jib has a six-foot-six-inch luff. She is, of course, completely ribbed and planked, in comparison with the usual carved model.

The uniqueness of this model is no less remarkable than its builder, now a quiet man near eighty. His father, a Gloucester fisherman (one who was on the Banks the terrible night during the late 1870's when so many vessels of the Gloucester fleet were lost with their entire crews) had migrated with his family from that great

fishing port to a small fishing village in southern Maine. When old enough the son began to follow in his father's wake, so to speak, hand lining from a dory, and rowing twelve to fifteen miles a day. The fleet of dory fishermen would leave their anchorage for the fishing grounds before dawn and seldom returned before dusk. The life of the fisherman during that era is aptly described in a few words from the old man: "Fisherman's luck? Wet feet and empty gut!"

