

Calendar

Microscopic Maritime

A Precious Collection of Tiny Yachts

They're a lot different from what you might normally think of as ship models," says Bob Crawford, curator of models at the San Diego Maritime Museum. "Normally you think of the models in the big glass cases. Well, there's a model of the U.S.S. *Constitution* in this show that would have been terribly impressive had it been in the usual eighth-of-an-inch to one-foot scale, which would be about 40 inches long. This one is about an eighth of that size. It's only five inches long."

The maker of this replica of the 18th-century American frigate, which a person could comfortably hold between

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thumb and forefinger, is Lloyd McCaffery of Cottonwood, Arizona. McCaffery surprised Crawford by sending the vessel to San Diego via ordinary surface mail. Some other lenders to the show brought their models personally by plane and hand-carried them into the museum. Crawford begins to say how much McCaffery's "Old Ironsides" is worth, then thinks better of informing would-be thieves. But looking on the website of the gallery that represents McCaffery — Art of the Sea of South Thomaston, Maine — it's easy to discover that its price tag says \$180,000.

The show is called "Masterpieces in Miniature: A Precious Collection of Tiny Yachts," but obviously the museum has stretched the meaning of the word "yacht," which we usually associate with cruises or races. The makers of two antique models included in the exhibit weren't at sea for pleasure or sport. These miniature warships



"The Endurance in the Ice" by Don Hubbard

from the era of the Napoleonic campaigns (1799–1815) were made by French prisoners of war.

"The British were capturing so many French seamen, they were putting them in prison hulks," says Crawford. "And the prisoners started building very elaborate but tiny models with the available materials on hand. They used beef bone for the structures themselves and, often, human hair in the rigging. Eventually they were able to acquire additional materials, threads and such — anything they could get their hands on. The prison officials permitted these activities by prisoners, but frowned upon them using bits of the boats that they lived on, although they tried to use them."

Several of these minuscule models are ships in bottles. One is by John Fox III of Rice Lake, Wisconsin. A genuine yacht, it's the 1851 schooner *America*, for which the America's Cup was named. According to Fox's website, he works from plans of the full-sized vessels, which he then uses his computer to redraft into digital form. That's the brainy part of the task; he doesn't divulge the dexterous part. But he does reveal his whimsical streak: he regularly puts ships inside light bulbs, and one of them is here in San Diego.

The miniatures in this show are almost models of models, it's suggested. Crawford agrees, adding that builder

Jerry Blair of Aptos, California, has made two differently scaled replicas of the yacht *Puritan*, winner of the 1885 America's Cup. One is 1/16 scale; the other is 1/32 — exactly half the size of the first. The duo is displayed side by side in the exhibit.

Local model builder Don Hubbard of Coronado has contributed several items, including a "diorama" in a bottle. It's a scene of Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance*, icebound in Antarctica in 1914.

Hubbard says he made the model outside the bottle, then shaved down one side, so it would be heeling. After that, on purpose, he carefully broke a few things before pushing it through the neck of the bottle. Ice floes crushed the real *Endurance*. The 75-year-old retired Naval officer made his ice chunks out of white acrylic. He also carved a lifeboat about 1/2 inch long. "And then I made some tiny, tiny people. I mean, they really aren't people. They're sticks, part-coated black showing these little fellows pulling the lifeboat."

Another Hubbard contribution is a fishing troller in a bottle for which he made a dozen infinitesimal paper seagulls with black-painted wing tips. Individually glued one to the other, before being set into the scene, they're meant to create the illusion of a flock following the ship.

Do these builders work in the

smallest scale possible for human hands or can the scale go even smaller?

"Certainly Lloyd McCaffery has pushed the envelope of reason," says Crawford, noting McCaffery's miniature carvings of figureheads and the actual wooden nails he uses to attach planking. "Peter Baker also pushes the limit. He generally likes to build obscure vessels. He has sent a Casco Bay scow sloop that's so detailed it looks as if it could actually operate." Baker is a retired professor from Philadelphia. His former academic field is no surprise: microbiology.

Magnifying glasses will be issued to visitors who want them. Alternatively, magnifiers have been built into some model cases. Says Crawford: "The nature of this show almost requires it."

— Jeanne Schinto

"Masterpieces in Miniature: A Precious Collection of Tiny Yachts"
On view through December 31
9:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. daily
San Diego Maritime Museum
1492 North Harbor Drive
On board the museum's
steamship "Berkeley"
\$6 for adults;
discounts for seniors, children,
active military, and groups
Info: 619-234-9153, ext. 101
or www.sdmaritime.com

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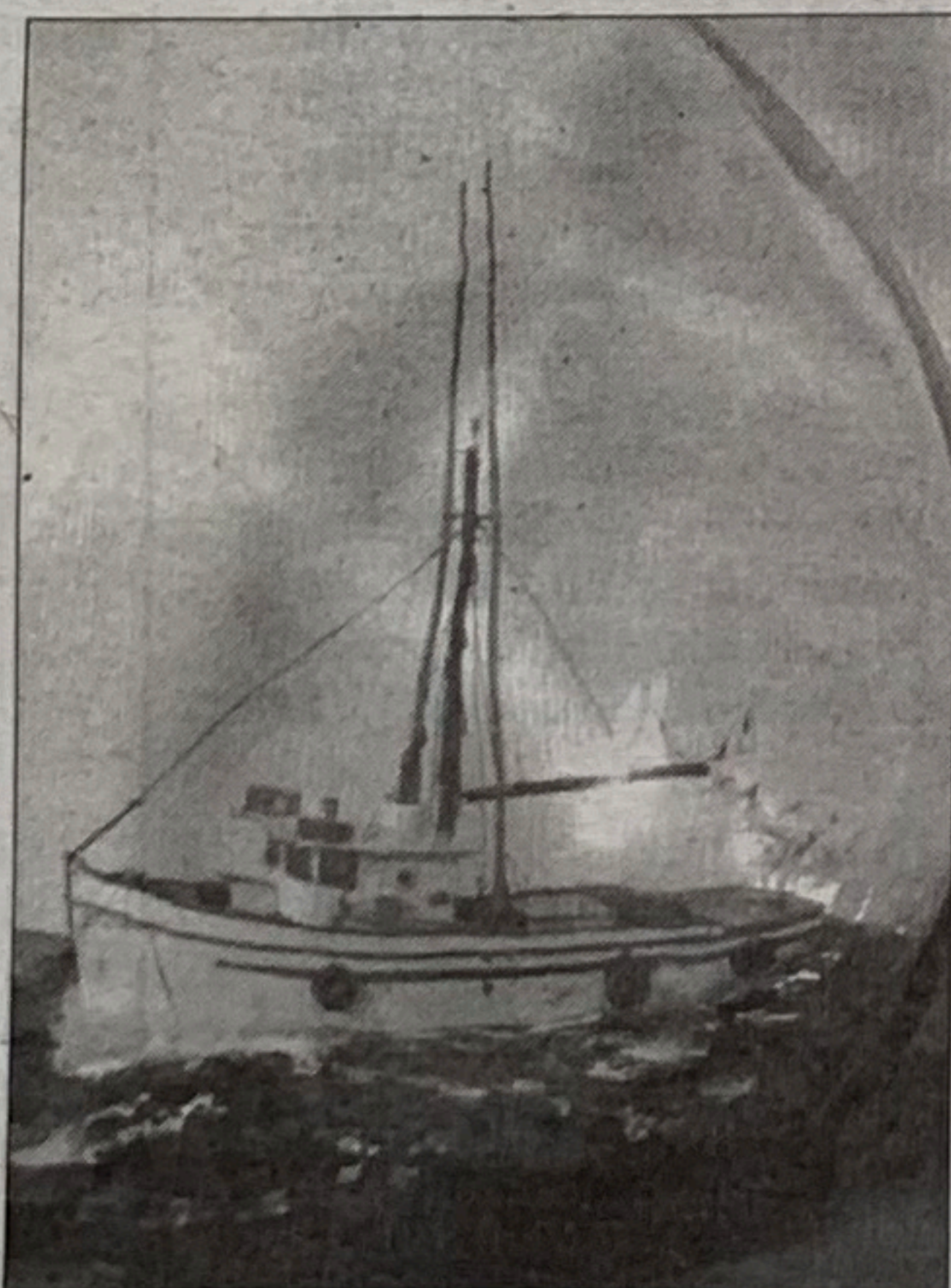
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"37 Trawler" by Don Hubbard