A Generic East Coast, Late 19th Century Oyster Sharpie

Circa: 1880 — 1890

An Introduction to "Scratch Building"

Monograph & Models by Bill Strachan

Plans by Al Saubermann

Distributed by: The Nautical Research Guild

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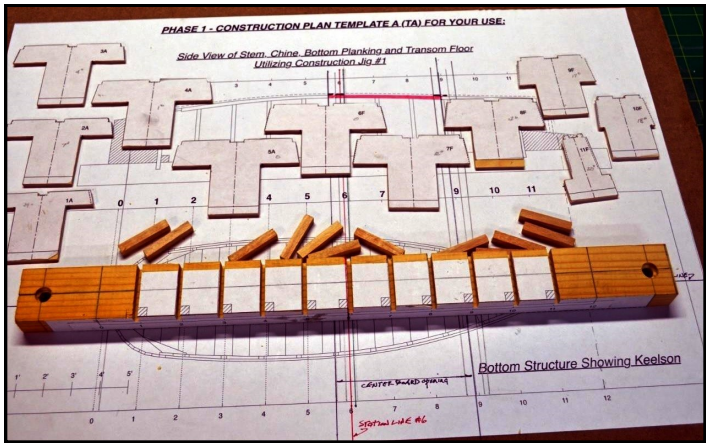
This monograph and plans is the second such offering by the Nautical Research Guild. You may recall that the first was the Continental Galley *Washington,* which, although billed as an intermediate level POF scratch build, is still a somewhat more complex vessel. Bill Strachan and Al Saubermann have done a masterful job of providing the novice and intermediate modeler with a subject that definitely fills the gap between kit models and a first time scratch building effort.

Sharpies are a type of hard-chined sailboat with a flat bottom, extremely shallow draft, and straight, flaring sides. With centerboards and shallow balanced rudders, they were well suited to sailing in shallow tidal waters where oysters could be found. These craft are believed to have originated in the New Haven, Connecticut region of Long Island Sound. Their use would eventually spread up and down the Eastern seaboard of the United States.

Strachan begins by offering some encouraging words for the first time scratch modeler, and how "peer pressure" should not influence one's enjoyment or satisfaction with what they have accomplished. He also provides his own philosophy when it comes to model ship building, which is very practical and reassuring for those not capable of going "full scratch" due to equipment or skill limitations. In many instances, he offers alternate methods for fabricating parts that were made with power tools.

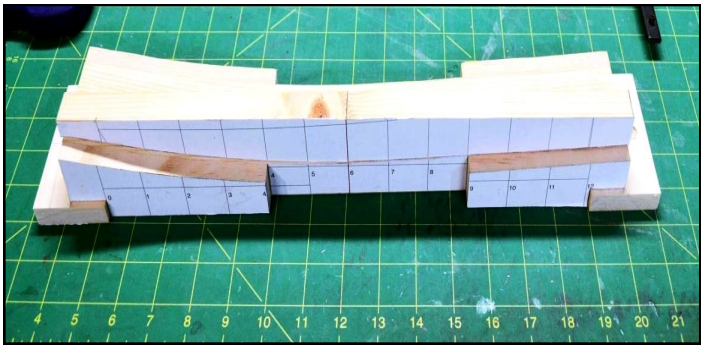
The monograph is broken down into five phases. Early on, the author utilizes abbreviations that identify various components used in the construction. Examples would be "BB1" for building board, and "ST" for station template. At first, you might find yourself referring back to these lists often, so making a separate reference sheet might be helpful.

The first phase addresses constructing a jig that allows the bottom framing and planking to be built upside down, which simulates actual practice. One critical aspect of

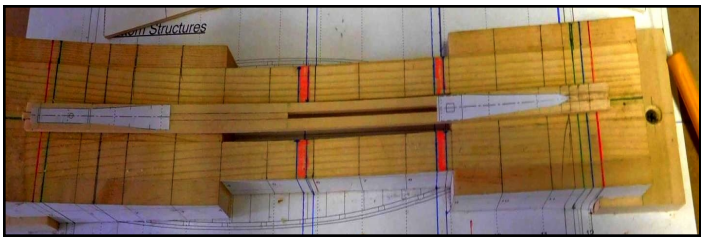


this segment is the fabrication of the 11 station templates with their various notches and bevels. Paper templates supplied in the plans help ensure accurate results during this step.

With the chine line actually rising above the waterline at the stem, the sharpie hull has a very distinctive shear As a result, the keelson has a sloping shape that gently curves from its point of greatest draft amidships up to the bow and stern.



Phase 2 addresses this with the fabrication of a second building jig, which utilizes the "press method" for shaping the strips that form the keelson. Although composed of only four pieces of wood, Strachan goes into considerable detail while fabricating the keelson. Again, templates help insure the correct shape at the bow and stern of this key assembly.



Other components addressed in this phase include the chines and bottom planking. Concerning this last item, the bottom planks can be a combination that varies from 4" to 8" in width, as long as the final result comes out even! The author stresses that test fitting all the pieces before gluing is the key.

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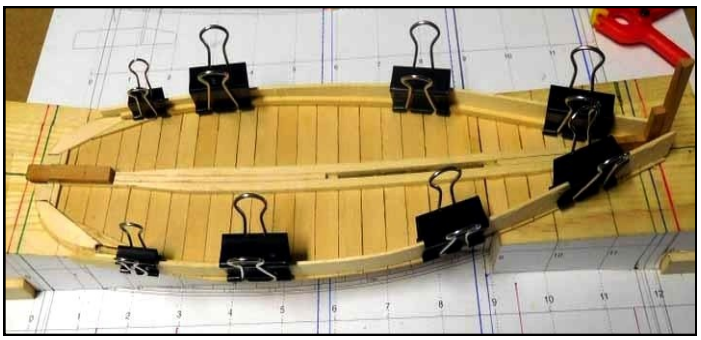
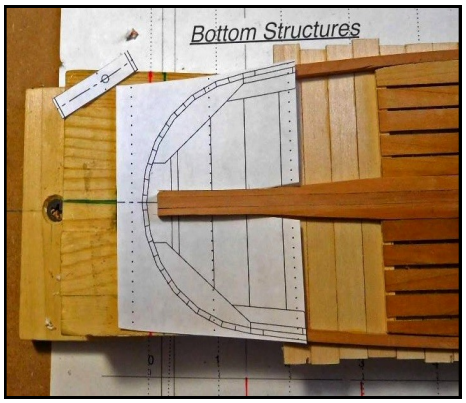
Phase 3 continues with the forward bottom planking, but also addresses the stem assembly, mast step block, mast logs, rudder related items, removable flooring, center board and trunk, lower side sheer plank, and vertical planked stern. This last item is a unique feature on these craft. The author provides two options, one being more difficult than the other. Nevertheless, both produce acceptable results if one follows the author's detailed instructions. Can you imagine trying to spile planks that will conform to that transom?

Speaking of spiled planks, the sharpie had three of them on each side of the hull. Again, the author provides templates for each one, which saves a lot of time and headaches. It is also interesting to note that the three planks are glued to each other along their edges and at the stem, before the frames are installed. Lots of clamps, and one of the station templates, are used to help with proper alignment.



The modeler is offered two choices when constructing the transom flooring. One reflects a construction method used in North Carolina, while the alternate layout, shown on the right, portrays a New Haven sharpie. It's quite evident throughout this monograph that the author believes in giving the modeler options.



Although considered a novice/intermediate project, the sharpie does present one challenge. Many of the various scantlings possess subtle bevels and angles. The author makes extensive use of disk and oscillating sanders when dealing with these pieces. He tries to minimize this challenge by providing the actual angles that the sander table should be set at.

With the hull structure essentially complete, Phase 4 gets into a lot of the interior scantlings and detail work This includes mast partners, deck beams, deck planking, false wale, and rub and toe rales with scuppers.

In addition to all items relating to the rudder, painting and weathering are also addressed. This last item is one of this writer's favorite segments. The author uses a "layer upon layer" technique that involves using lots of Q-tips, one of three different black India solutions, paint washes, chalks, pastels, sharpie markers, and color pencils. In most cases, he recommends that they be applied to components as they are being made. Practicing on mockups first is highly recommended.

The final phase, number 5, addresses masting, rigging, and saw horses as a way of mounting your model. The author provides two masting and rigging options, a gaff rig and a simple sprit rig. This last phase concentrates on the gaff rig for the most part, since it is the more complex style. The authors technique for fabricating shackles and stropping blocks with galvanized 28-gauge wire is especially noteworthy.

There are other handy tips offered in this monograph. Examples are an easily made container for soaking wood strips, miniature clamps made from Acco paper clips, and plank joints "caulked" with a brown Sharpie pen.

One nice touch concerning this 277-page monograph is the fact that you can download the instructions off the NRG website at no cost. This will allow you to review Strachan's work, which is richly illustrated with 441 color photographs and detailed diagrams. References and other sources are also clearly footnoted for the modeler, and the documentation includes a full bibliography.

If the Sharpie interests you, a set of plans can be ordered from the home office. The cost is $65.00 plus S&H for members, and $80.00 plus S&H for nonmembers.

You will receive 11 sheets. Three of these drawings are used as templates, and include a full-size building board pattern. The plans offer three options for completing your model. As a result, the sharpie provides the modeler with a wide range of options for detailing, paint schemes, sailing rigs, and weathering.

Reviewed by
Bob Filipowski