

Model took 1,400 hours

Steamboat lives on in miniature



Charlie Langell works on one of his intricate ship models. (Staff photo by Gary Caskey)

By W.W. EDGAR

As a young lad growing up in Marine City Charlie Langell, Canton Township painter and wood carver, spent many an hour in Tashmoo Park on Harsen's Island.

There, on the summer afternoons, he never missed a chance to watch the Steamship Tashmoo dock to deliver mail and passengers to the one-time popular playground in the St. Clair River.

And each day, in his childish dreams, he envisioned the day when he would own a boat like that. It didn't help matters when, as he grew older, he used to ride the boat as far as Port Huron for the mail delivery.

Fate decreed that he never would own The Tashmoo, but Langell did the next best thing. He carved a replica of the boat that was his childhood dream.

His latest handiwork is a boat two-feet long and five inches wide and it is an exact replica of the original boat that was 306 feet long and 58 feet wide.

SITTING IN THE workshop in his home at Canton Center and Ford Road, Langell confided that he had built many models, the most famous of which is the Mayflower that rests in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel, but the Tashmoo gave him his greatest challenge.

"There were no plans available," he said. "The boat was built in 1909 and was a marvel until she burned at Amherstburg in 1936 and the plans were lost somewhere along the line."

"All I had to work with were picture post cards and one or two side view pictures friends sent to me. I had to judge the rest and figure working on these collections and fig-

uring for 10 years I was able to get to work."

Langell claims he worked more than 1,400 hours on his pet project. But it was a labor of love. He'll tell you that few grown men have replicas of their boyhood dreams. "But I have. I had to make it myself — but it is the flagship of all the replicas I have made in my time."

AS THE CANTON hobbyist chatted, he allowed the years to roll back to his boyhood when he accompanied his mother and some of the neighbors to Tashmoo Park for a picnic.

There were no restaurants or dance floors in those days. There were about a half-dozen swings and a small baseball field. And, as he recalls it, the island was filled with tepees brought over by the Indians from Walpole Island. There they sold beads and other Indian handicraft.

While he confided that he fell in love with the Tashmoo at first sight, he really became attached to it when he was able to ride on it as it delivered the mail to the ports at St. Clair, Marysville and Port Huron.

"Gad, how I dreamed of the day when I could own a boat like that. When I started to ride it the Tashmoo had no dining room or ball room."

"There were just a lot of chairs around the deck, but I watched it grow until it became the most popular of all touring steamers on the Great Lakes."

Langell shook his head and recalled the boat's last days. When the inter-urban trolley line came up from Detroit and took over the mail, the Tashmoo was doomed. It wasn't profitable with passenger traffic alone.

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