The Essex Miniature Room

As a child summering on the east coast, I was fascinated by sea stories and was particularly influenced by the children's illustrated version of Jules Verne's book, "20,000 Under The Sea". As you may recall, the book's main characters were aboard a whaling frigate which was sunk by Captain Nemo's submarine, the Nautilus. Over the years, my fascination with whaling, the sea and sea stories has continued. I enjoyed reading various books on the subject as well as enjoying movies, etc. Also, a few years ago, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the well known maritime artist John Stobart on two whaling related roomboxes. One of which is on display as part of the Kaye Browning Miniature Collection at the Kentucky Gateway Museum in Maysville, KY.

Several years ago I was asked to join a crew of a 57 foot sail boat which was sailing from Maryland to the Virgin Islands. During that trip, I experienced the wrath of the ocean during extremely stormy weather while sailing into the eye of hurricane Kate. We experienced near disaster when our boat capsized, and all of us got to seriously think about what survival on a life raft might be like should we be forced to abandon ship. Fortunately, the boat was able to right itself, and we were able to sail on after several days of floating like a cork in the hurricane.

This box, "Hard Against the Wind", was inspired by my personal experiences, and the true story of survival of the crew of the whaling ship Essex which was sunk by a sperm whale 2,000 nautical miles from South America in 1820. The Essex was rammed twice by a sperm whale and eventually sank after several hours. All twenty crew members escaped in three small boats and were adrift at sea for over 99 days. They were short on water and food and only survived by resorting to cannibalism. Eight of the twenty men were eventually rescued in 1821. The amazing thing about all of this to me was that three of the survivors eventually returned to the sea and to whaling.

The book, "Moby Dick", by Herman Melville was also, in part, inspired by the sinking of Essex.

The Essex, a three masted frigate, was 88 feet in length and 25 feet wide. No one knows exactly what the captain's quarters and the ship's hold looked like. As a result, I used my imagination and based my box's design

on several books written by the Essex's survivors. I also conducted additional research at the Mystic Seaport Museum where the original whaling ship, The Morgan, has been restored and is on permanent display.

This box, like most all of my other boxes measures 12 X 24 X 11 and built to the scale of one inch equals one foot. The construction of this box was particularly difficult because I wanted to show and illuminate the lower levels of the ship, the ceiling skylight, the views and sunlight from the port lights as well as the details of the captain's quarters themselves, and the hold including the whaling equipment stored there. In addition, I wanted to construct the box in a way which would show the ship heeling at a 10 degree angle. This angle would have been the typical degree of heel on a close reach just off the wind.