



John McKay/Times-Colonist

■ VON EPP has special place in his heart for Nonsuch; he sailed two years in replica of the famous ship.

Model of Hudson's Bay ship labor of love for its builder

By Patrick Murphy
Times-Colonist staff

"Let's go up and play with the toys," David Von Epp tells the visitor to the Maritime Museum of B.C. as he dons his lab coat and pulls out his model-making tools.

His latest project on the second floor of the Bastion Square museum is a one-sixteenth-scale model of the 17th-century, Hudson's Bay Company trading ship the Nonsuch.

"This model has been a labor of love," the museum model maker said in an interview.

"It has been, honestly, eight years in the making. I don't know when it will be finished.

"Building it has been a nice memory trip, but you end up talking to people rather than doing the building."

The memory trip is his recollection of spending two years and 5,200 nautical miles sailing in a replica of the famed vessel in the 1970s.

He was a gunner on the English-built replica, and supervised the casting of the six work-

ing cannons for the ship.

The original Nonsuch left England for Hudson Bay on June 3, 1668 with Sieur Des Groseilliers.

It returned the next year with a cargo of furs which prompted the Hudson's Bay Company to seek a royal charter for trade in the New World. That charter was granted in 1670.

The replica was built to mark the 300th anniversary of the voyage and sailed the Great Lakes and the Pacific Coast before being installed in a specially-built museum in Winnipeg.

In the Canadian Encyclopedia, historian James Marsh said the replica was considered to be the most accurate reconstruction of a 17th-century vessel.

"It was a great way to spend a couple of years," said Von Epp.

"We had a lot of fun scaring off people with the cannon."

It was at this time that Von Epp wanted to make a career switch from historical research and professional model making to museum work.

He upgraded his training and became a curator and conservator

at several museums until he left Ottawa two years ago to strike out on his own as a restorer of china at his Brentwood Bay Village Gallery shop.

He kept his hand in at model making, but as a hobby.

"Building models professionally is a great way to ruin a hobby," he said.

"What do you do when you go home to relax? Build a model boat?"

He has 20 or 30 models to his credit from a replica of the Tower of London to the Nonsuch.

He works on it and chats with the public every Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the maritime museum.

"It's somewhat akin to painting a portrait of someone you love.

"Every inch of it is something you have lived with. I scrubbed those decks. I slept in that little cubbyhole.

"I get to play with all this museum stuff even when I'm at work here.

"These are my toys."