

The Day

12-Foot Model Floats Seaport's Boat

Reproduction of historic vessel almost big enough to be seaworthy

, [Joe Wojtas](#) Published on 2/26/2008



By [Sean D. Elliot](#)

Mystic Seaport's senior curator, Bill Peterson, talks about a model of the Clermont, the first viable commercial steamboat. Built for a 1940 movie, the model may eventually be on display at the museum's visitors' center.

public display in the visitors' center this summer.

The development of the original Clermont was a collaboration between steamboat developer Robert Fulton and New York Chancellor Robert Livingston, who negotiated the

Mystic — Mystic Seaport has approximately 550 boats and 2,000 ship models in its vast collection.

Its newest addition, though, is not only its largest model. It's also big enough to be a small boat.

Last week, the museum officially took ownership of a 12-foot model of the Clermont, the world's first commercially viable steamboat. Donated by a man in California, it arrived in a large FedEx box from a museum in Clermont, N.Y., where it had been on display.

Museum Senior Curator Bill Peterson said the real Clermont, which was built in 1807 and stretched 133 feet long, marked a significant event in maritime history.

"For thousands of years people used sails and oars. This was the first new technology to be developed. It revolutionized maritime history from that point on," he said. "So it's great to have it here."

The model is now in the Collections Research Center, but plans are to build a case around it and put it on

Louisiana purchase with France. Built in New York City, it was known as the North River Steamboat of Clermont. Its inaugural trip took it from New York City to Clermont and Albany and back. The successful trip allowed the two men to capitalize on a 20-year monopoly on Hudson River steamboat service that Livingston had obtained from the New York legislature. They went on to build other boats.

The model was one of a dozen made in 1940 for the movie "Little Old New York, starring Fred MacMurray of "My Three Sons" fame. Peterson said the man who donated the model obtained it from the movie studio. Most recently it had been on display for the boat's 200th anniversary at the Clermont State Historic Site, which encompasses the Livingston family estate.

Peterson said the museum in Clermont did not want to keep the model, and the donor contacted Mystic Seaport because he thought it would be a great place for it. Peterson went to Clermont to look at the model and the museum accepted the donation.

While the model is the largest in its collection, the museum already had another model of the Clermont, which at eight inches is ironically one of its smallest.

The deck is made out of oak and the boiler is copper. A small electric motor runs the metal gears and large paddles. It also has rigging and sails and Peterson said it is historically accurate except for a few details such as the wire rigging, which would have been rope.

Peterson said he hopes the model is important for another reason.

"I hope it will help remind people that Mystic Seaport is not just about whaling ships and sailing ships. We're interested in all kinds of maritime history and technology," he said.

Stonington