

revised edition

Whittling the Old Sea Captain



Mike Shipley

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Foreword

The characters in this book are designed to be fairly simple and, above all, fun to carve. Any time I choose a piece to carve, the number one thing in my mind is, "Will I enjoy carving it?" If I have to struggle with a piece, the enjoyment pretty well disappears.

These characters are not what you might call "action figures"—they are just enjoyable to carve. They can be altered to be several different kinds of characters if you like. If you don't like the size, use a copy machine on the pattern. Sometimes enlarging or reducing a pattern can completely change your outlook on a carving.

I would suggest carving all the characters, the buoys, the lobster traps, and the other accessories. Find a piece of small mesh netting and use the carvings to create your own scene. If you have limited shelf space, just reduce the patterns and make a smaller scene.

I don't know about you, but with me time and money are always short. What better way to invest them both than in woodcarving? If you are a beginner, just remember that a successful woodcarver doesn't happen overnight. Be patient. As someone once said, "A man can succeed at almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm."

—Mike Shipley

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The Old Sea Captain



The old sea captain is a very serious guy. He's seen a lot of long days at sea. But whether the seas be calm or stormy, or the fishing be good or bad, his confidence never wavers. A captain is only as good as his crew, and, from the looks of his first and second mates, this captain has his hands full.





The captain's beard is very full, probably from being out at sea so long. As you carve the facial features, be sure to leave plenty of extra wood along the chin and jaw line to accommodate the captain's bushy beard. I use a $\frac{1}{16}$ " (2mm) V-tool to detail the beard. Make lots of different length cuts. Some lines should be wavy to give the illusion of real whiskers. These same techniques can be used on the mustaches, eyebrows, and hair of the other characters.

The First Mate



The first mate has one purpose in life, and that's to squeeze all the work he can out of the second mate. When he says jump, the second mate asks how high. He's tough, but underneath it all he's just an old softy.





For many carvers, hands are one of the toughest areas to carve successfully. Putting a character's hands in his pockets is a simple way to reduce the difficulty of a piece. Simply carve a bulge under the material of the coat or pants to indicate the presence of a hand in the pocket. More advanced carvers may want to alter the patterns in this book so that the hands are visible or even holding a buoy or some other object.

The Second Mate



The second mate enjoys life and doesn't have a care in the world, except when the first mate is watching. The two of them have been through everything from 100-foot waves to being stranded on a desert island, but like any good crew they stick together.





Buttons can be made any number of ways. One of the quickest ways to make a perfectly shaped button is to use an eye punch. I often use a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) eye punch, but you can use larger or smaller sized punches for differently sized buttons. To make the button, push the tool gently but firmly into the wood. Apply just enough pressure to make a visible circle. Add some paint, and you have a nicely rounded button.

The Accessories



Lobster traps, crates, buoys, and oars are all perfect accessories for your old sea captain and his crew. These simple items can be carved easily out of scrap pieces of wood. Use other props, such as netting or a boat, to make the scene even more realistic.



Chapter One

Carving the Old Sea Captain

Before You Begin

I use a variety of tools, but for these projects you won't need many tools. Medium price range tools work very well. The tools listed below will be all the tools you'll need to finish the projects in this book.

- Bench knife
- $\frac{3}{8}$ " (10mm) V-tool
- $\frac{1}{16}$ " (2mm) V-tool
- $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) U-gouge
- Awl
- Fine-tipped bench knife
- $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) eye punch

I will be using basswood for the old captain and his crew. Although other woods will work just as well, basswood is always my first choice for carvings of this size.

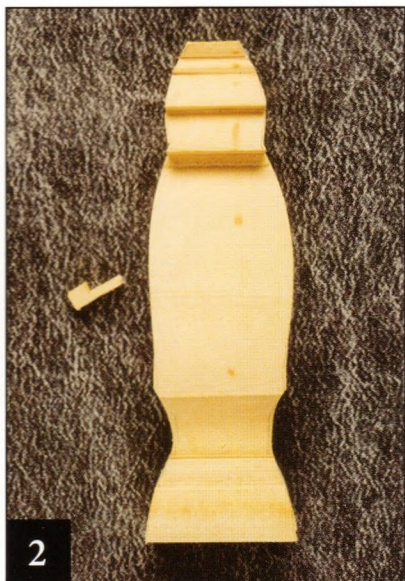
It's important to not let a blade get too dull between each sharpening. A blade should be sharpened and shaped on a stone. When it dulls, buff it on a bench grinder with a cotton or cloth buffing wheel coated with jeweler's rouge buffing compound. A blade can be buffed several times before using a stone. The buffing provides a good, quick cutting edge and saves excess wear on the blade.

Safety is an important part of carving. Whether you're a beginner or an old pro, always take a minute before you begin to consider your own safety. Always keep your knife sharp. Always keep control of your tool. And always keep your fingers out of the way!

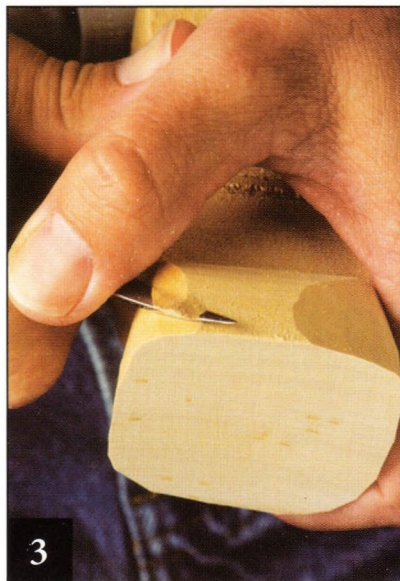


First trace the side view on a block of basswood. Using a band saw or a coping saw, cut as close to the lines as possible. Always saw the side view first. Leave enough wood on the back of the head and base to make the blank lie flat on the band saw table. This will make the blank more stable when sawing the front view.





Trace the front view on the blank. Remember to saw as close to the lines as possible. Now let's get busy.



Start by rounding the corners of the base with a bench knife. Continue rounding the base until it is well proportioned all the way around.



Now start rounding the coat. Because of the grain, carve down toward the base. Finish rounding the coat on all sides. Use your thumb pressure to regulate the amount of wood that you remove. Constant thumb pressure also helps you to control the blade, preventing accidents.



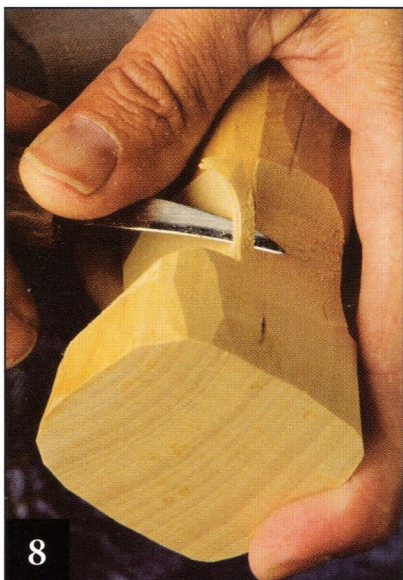
Next round the coat on the upper body and shoulders. You'll notice that I change the position of the carving throughout this demonstration. Hold the carving in a position that is comfortable for you and works well with the grain.



Round the coat up under the chin and finish the upper body. With these rounding steps, we are just basically removing the rough, sawed surface.



After the coat is rounded, move up to the head and round the hat. Don't cut to the shape of the hat yet—just remove the sawed surface of the wood.



Move down to the boots and knock off the edges of the blank below the bottom of the coat.



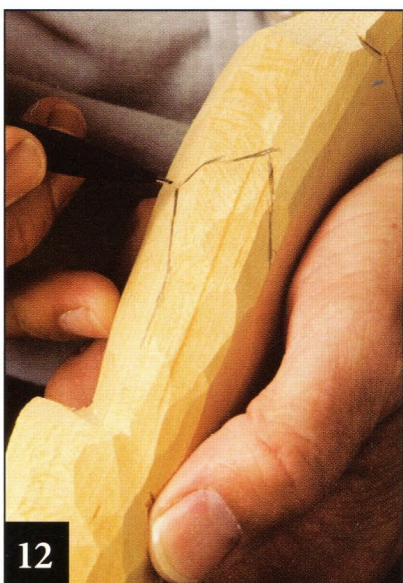
Finish rounding the boots, but don't try to finish the boots completely yet. All we want to do now is get the general shape of the boots.



With a $\frac{3}{8}$ " (10mm) V-tool, cut a line all the way around where the boot soles join the base. Make sure the base height is the same all the way around.



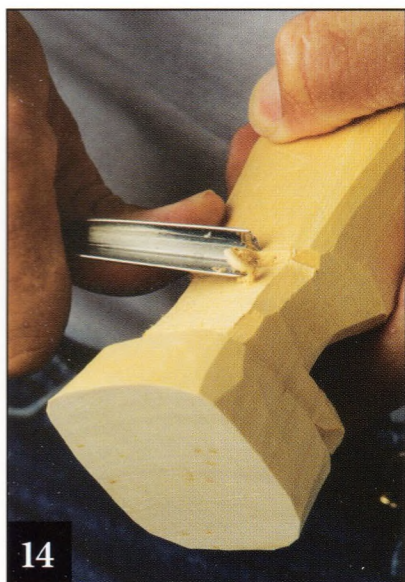
Remove more wood around the line to shape the boots a little more. The boot toes will be separated, so leave some extra wood in front.



Now with the captain roughed out, we can start with some details. Pencil on the arms on both sides. Take care to get the arms proportional with each other.



The brim should drop slightly around the sides of the face. Pencil on a line to indicate where the hat brim meets the face.



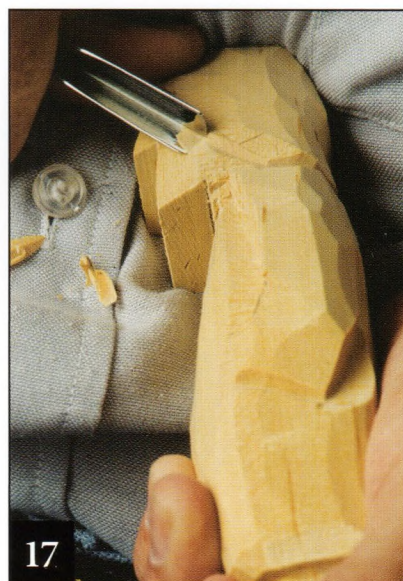
Cut a line around the bottom of the coat with the large V-tool. Make sure the coat is even on all sides.



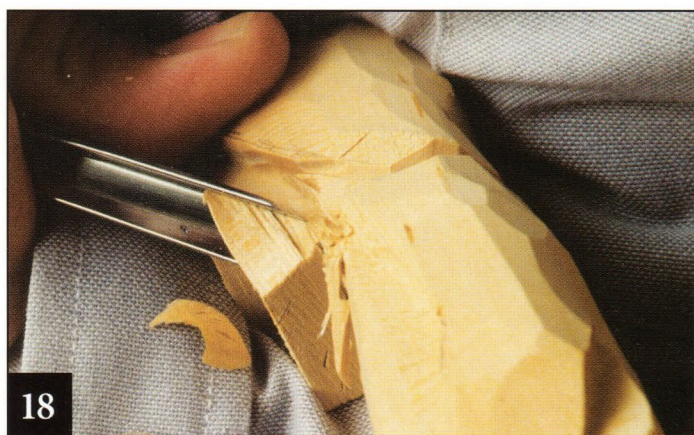
With the large V-tool, cut the pencil lines to outline the arms. Start cutting these lines deeper to bring out the arms. Because the coat is loose-fitting, the arms will not be too prominent.



Roughly shape the arms, front and back.



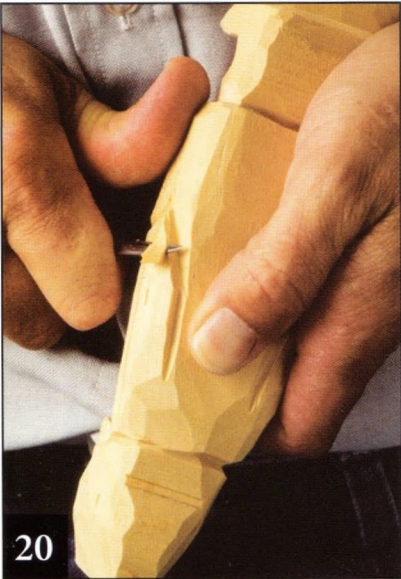
Cut the line around the hat brim. Then remove some wood under the hat brim on the sides of the head. Notice the face will be narrower at the top.



Continue roughing in the face on both sides. As you rough in the face, keep checking the proportions of the face on both sides.



Now clean up a little with a bench knife. Don't try to finish the face now. Just rough it in at this point.



Clean up the arms with a knife.



Remove some wood on the coat to bring out the arms.



Clean up both arms and check their proportions. Are both arms the same width and length?



Remove wood from the shoulders under the hat brim.



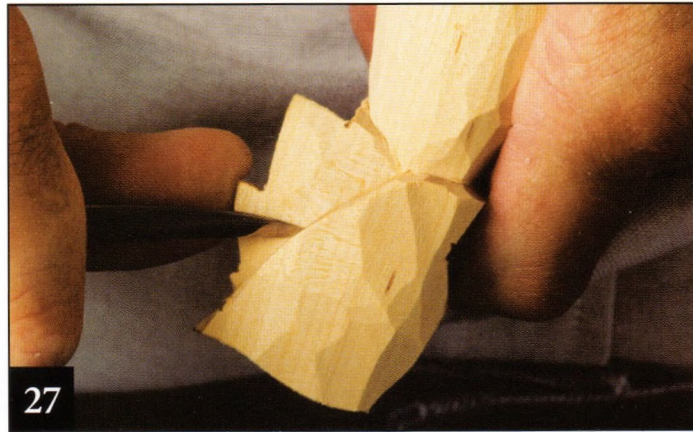
Shape the arms up to the shoulders and under the hat.



Clean up under the hat on all sides.



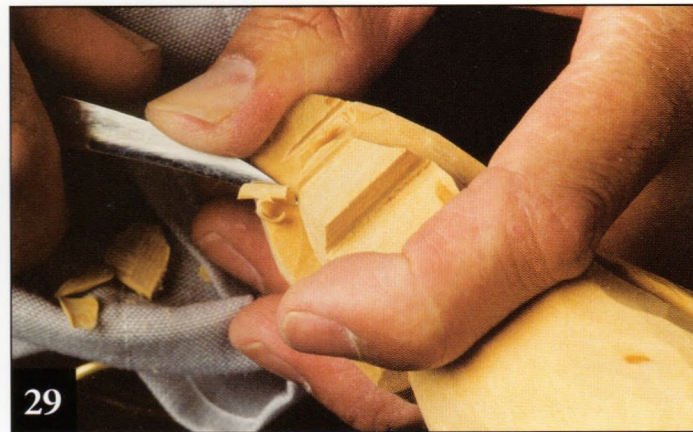
With a bench knife, shape the face until the dimensions look natural. After a few more cuts here, the face will be a nice size.



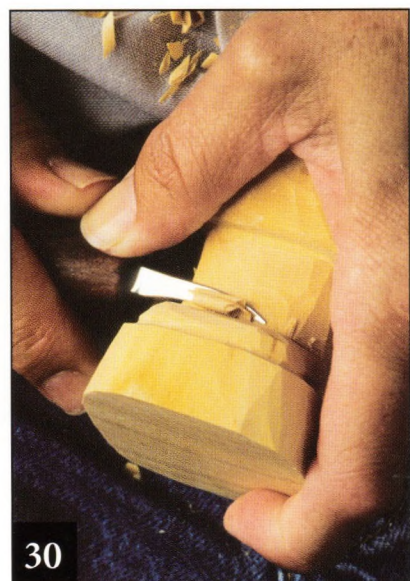
With the knife tip, cut around the face and hat.



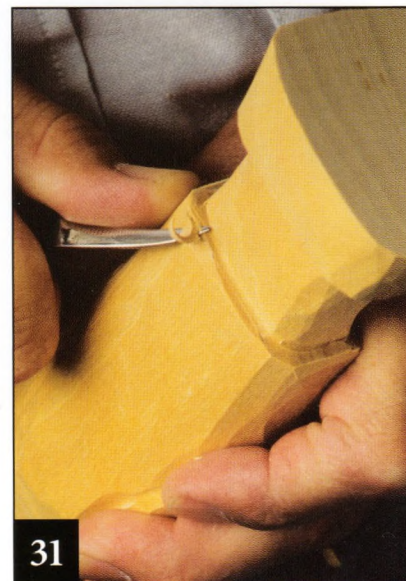
Clean up under the hat brim. Use thumb pressure on the back of the blade to control the knife. You don't want to damage the hat brim or your fingers.



As you finish under the hat brim, remove some extra wood in a couple places to make the brim look wavy or droopy.



Next, work all around the boots until they start shaping up. On the front of the boots, remove a small amount of wood next to the foot to give the boots some shape. We want to avoid making the boots come straight down to the foot. Clean up the top of the feet.



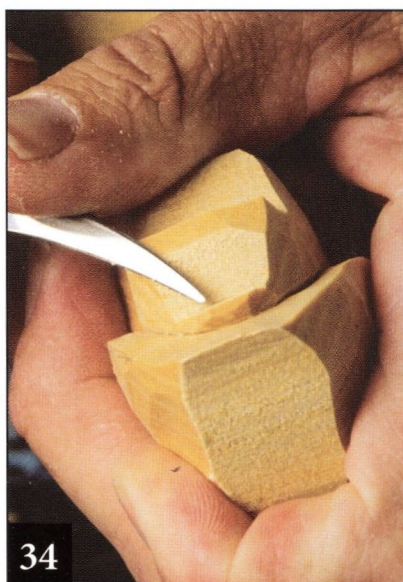
Clean up around the bottom of the coat.



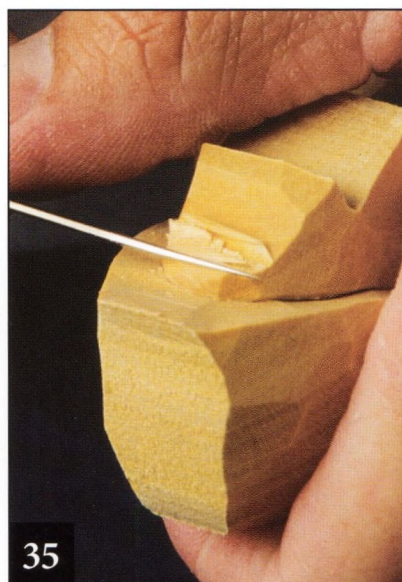
Now back to the head again. I move all over a carving like this during the roughing-in process so that all areas of the piece will be at the same stage.



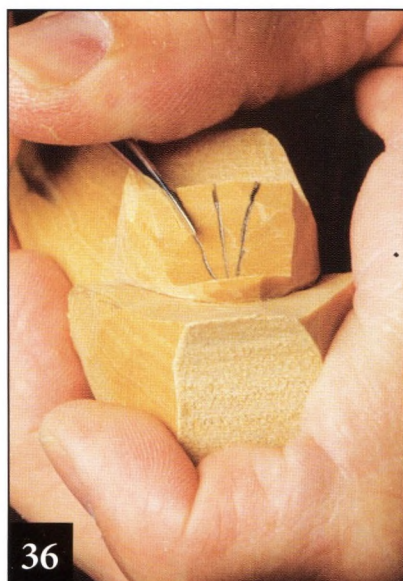
Start cleaning up under the jaw and beard area. Cut away the sawed surfaces so the area where the beard meets the jaw is smooth and rounded.



Be careful to leave enough wood for eyebrows. Round the forehead under the hat brim.



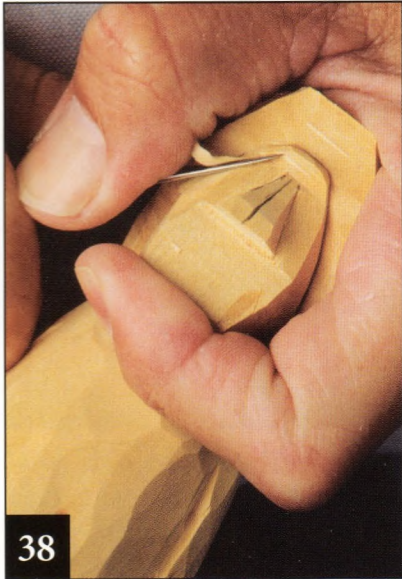
Clean up the eyebrow enough to leave a good ridge of wood.



Pencil on a rough nose. Then, with a bench knife, cut straight in to outline the nose.



Remove wood on each side of the nose and clean up each side. Using thumb pressure to control the blade is very important when working on the face. If you make cuts that are too deep, you may not be able to work them out when you finish the face.



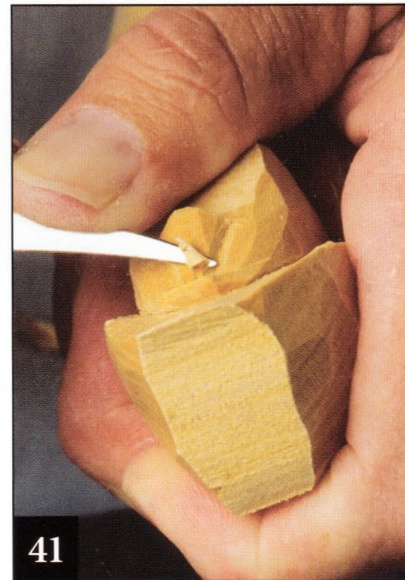
Round the edges of the face on each side.



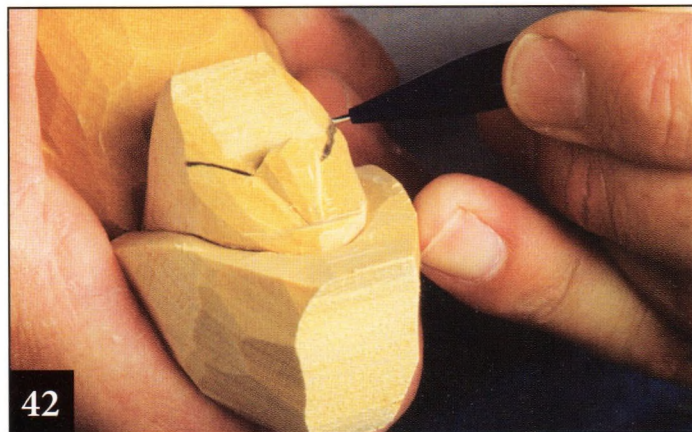
Start shaping the nose by cutting the bottom corner on each side.



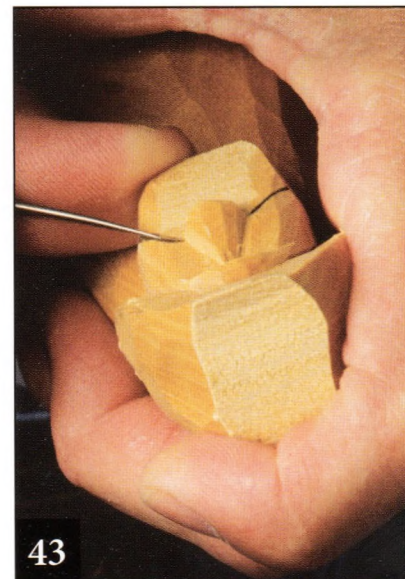
Shape the bottom of the nose next. Remember, a nose is longer in the middle and slightly shorter on each side.



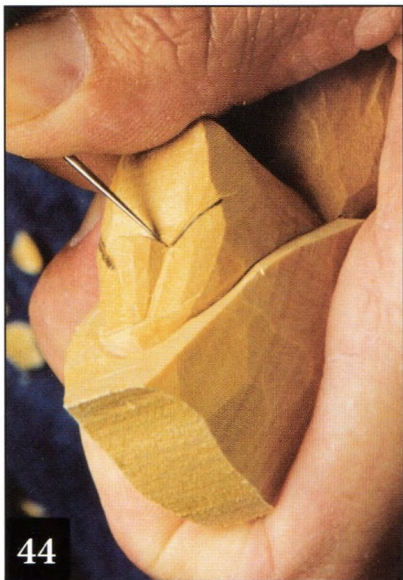
Now round the nose slightly and clean it up a little.



Before marking on the cheek lines, make sure the outside corners of the nose are cut in shorter than the middle of the nose. Then pencil on the cheek line from the outer edge of the face to the outside corners of the nostrils.



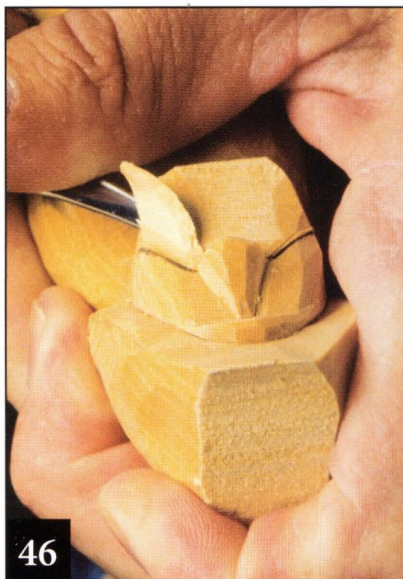
With the knife tip, cut the cheek lines.



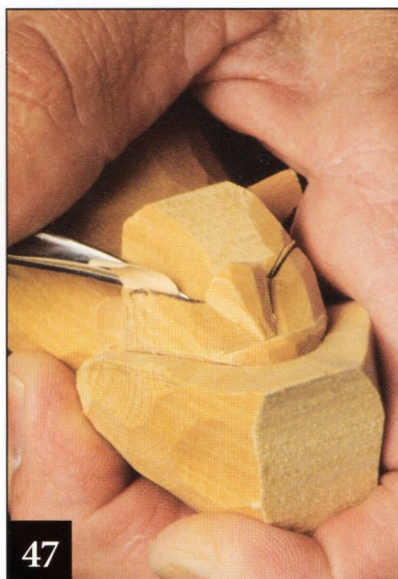
Cut straight in at the nostril and cheek.



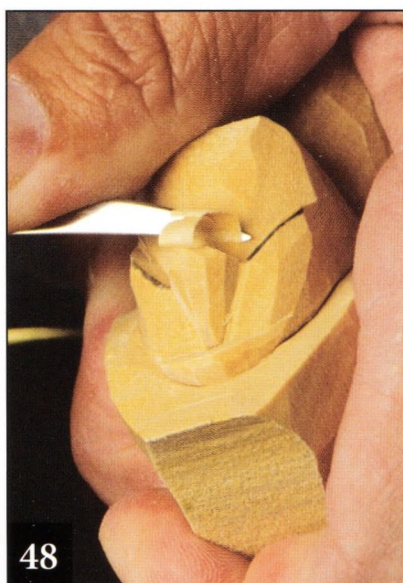
Cut the other side to match.



Now remove some wood up to the cheek.



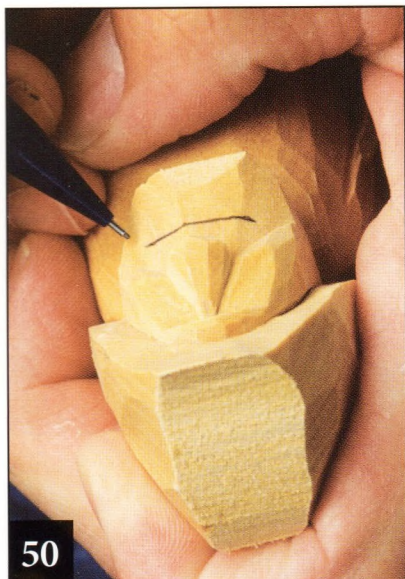
Take the cut in pretty deep to raise the cheek, and round the mouth and lip areas.



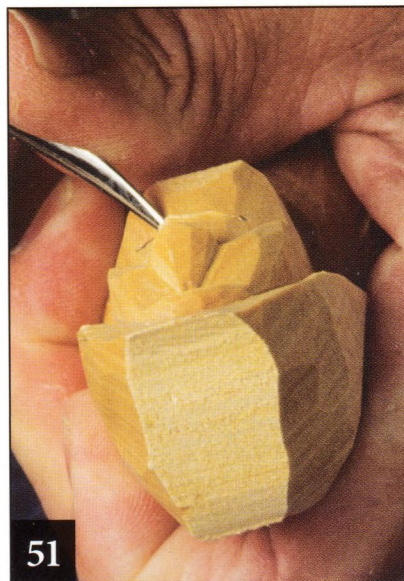
Clean up the mouth area. The mouth should appear raised and slope deeply over to the cheeks.



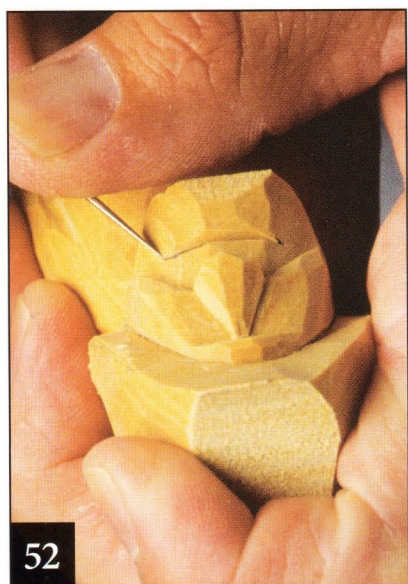
Round and shape the cheeks.



Pencil on the mouth.
The captain won't
have much of a smile.



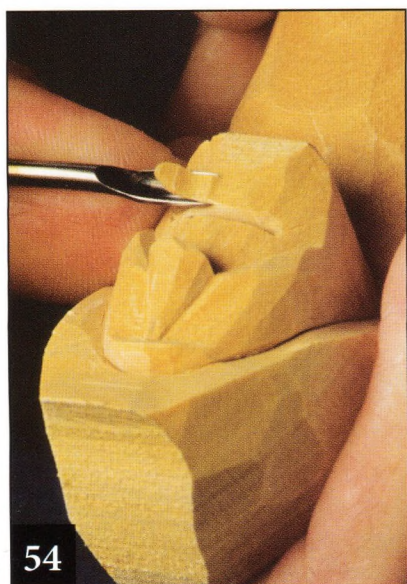
With a knife, cut
the mouth line fairly
deep. Remove a thin
sliver of wood at the
bottom of the cut to
separate the upper
and lower lips.



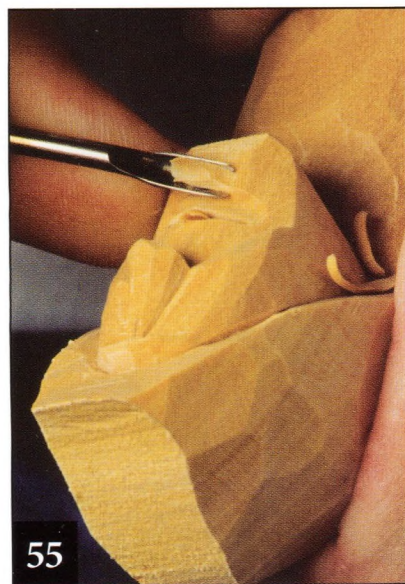
Cut in at each corner
of the mouth.



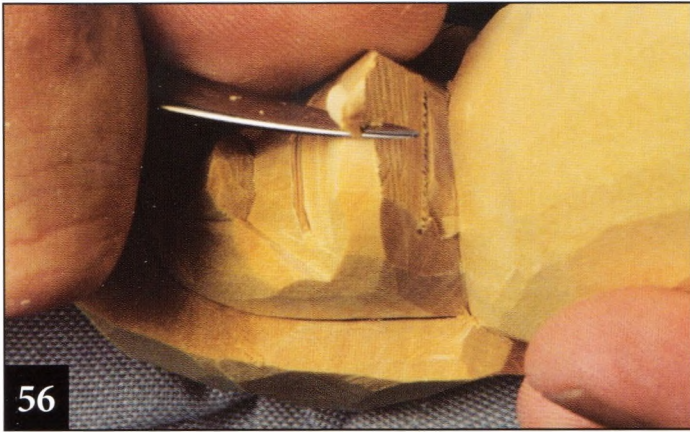
Notice the cut at each corner of the mouth. With the
knife tip, cut in at each cut. This will tuck the lip into
each corner of the mouth.



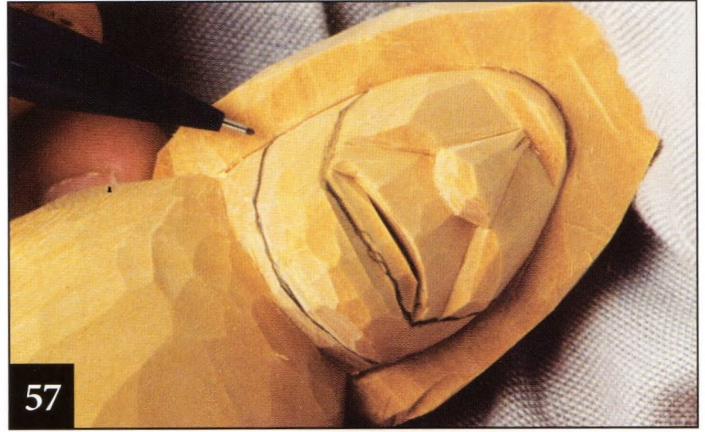
With a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm)
U-gouge, make a
cut across just under
the lower lip to raise
the lip.



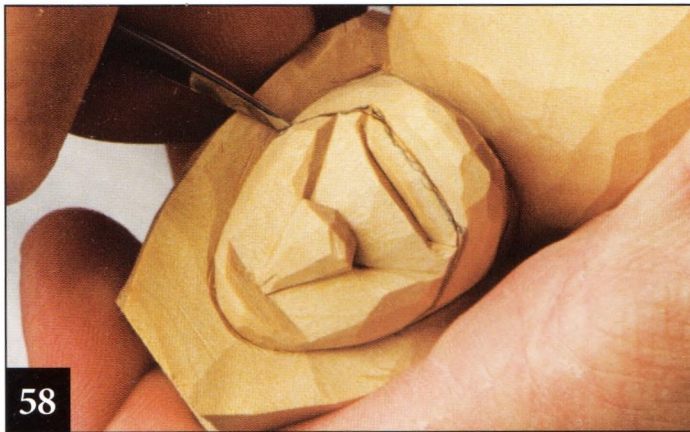
Deepen the area
under the lip with
the U-gouge.



Now use a knife to clean up around the beard area.



After shaping the beard area, pencil on the actual beard lines. The beard will flow up on the cheeks and just under the bottom lip.



With the knife tip, cut in the beard lines.



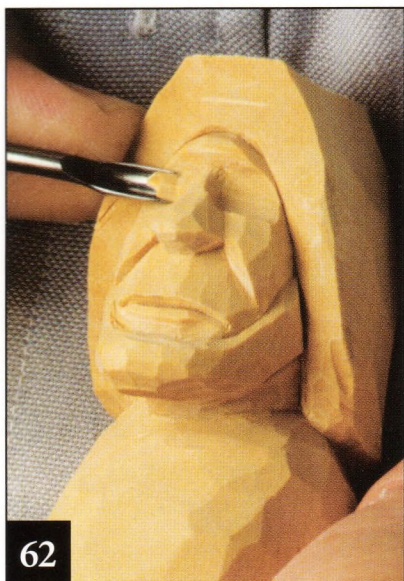
Using the cut line as a stop, remove wood on the neck under the beard. The neck area will be covered with the material of the coat.



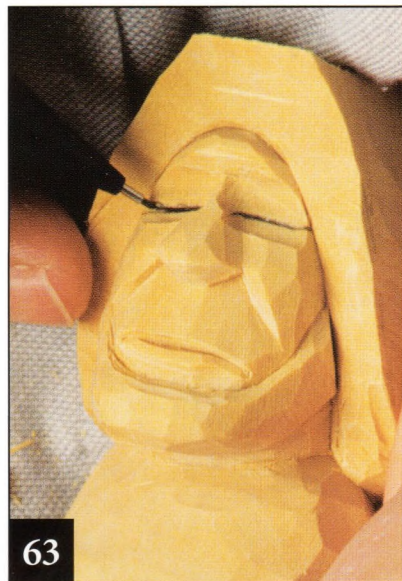
Remove wood along the cheeks to raise the beard away from the face. Continue removing wood around the beard to clean it up.



With a $\frac{1}{16}$ " (2mm) V-tool, cut across under the bottom lip to raise the lip a little more.



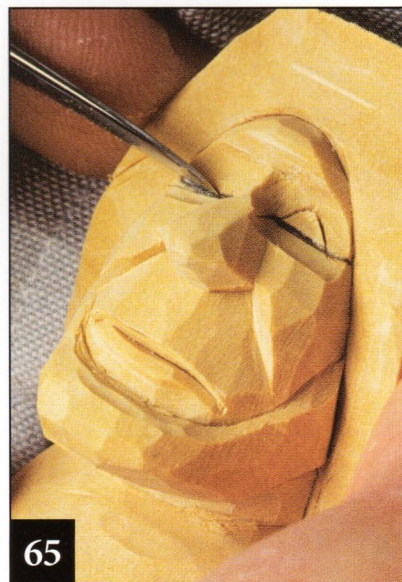
Now we're getting somewhere. With the $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) U-gouge, scoop out the eye sockets. Make them shallow, egg-shaped sockets.



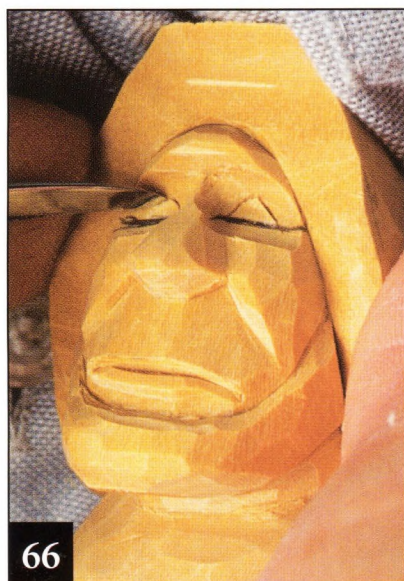
Pencil a straight line on each socket. This will be the lower eyelid. Make sure the lids are even on both sides. It is very easy to get the eyes mismatched or cross-eyed. The eyes usually make or break a carving, so take the time to get the pencil marks right before you make any cuts.



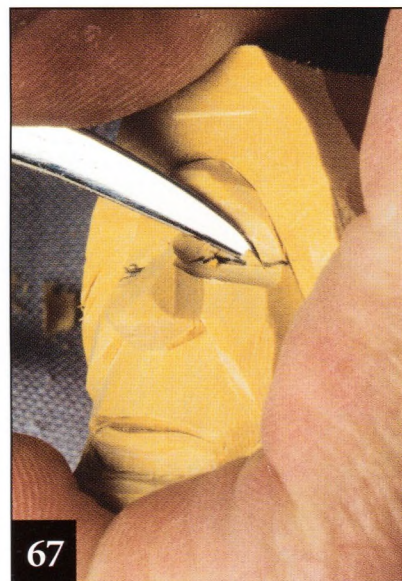
With the knife tip, cut the line. Then cut a half moon above. You might want to pencil in the half moon shape before cutting.



On the other side, cut the line for the lower eyelid.



Then cut a half moon above the line, just like the other side. Again, make sure both shapes match.



Now gently trim away the outside corner of the eyeball.



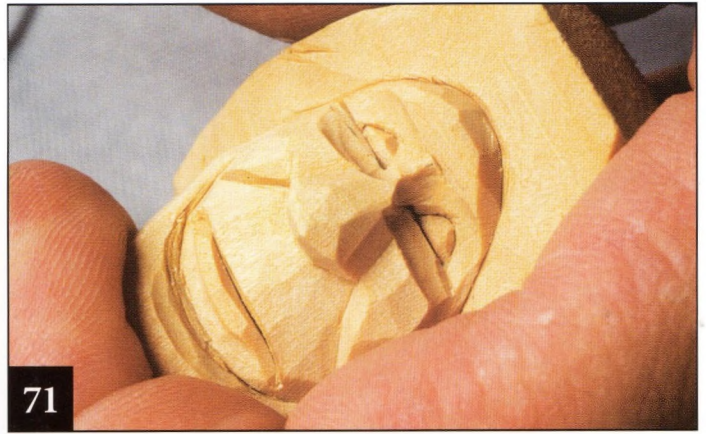
Trim away the inside corner of the eyeball.



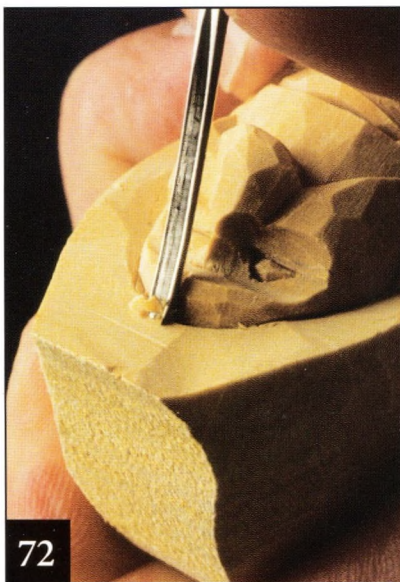
Move to the other eye. Trim the outside corner of the eyeball. Then trim the inside corner of the eyeball.



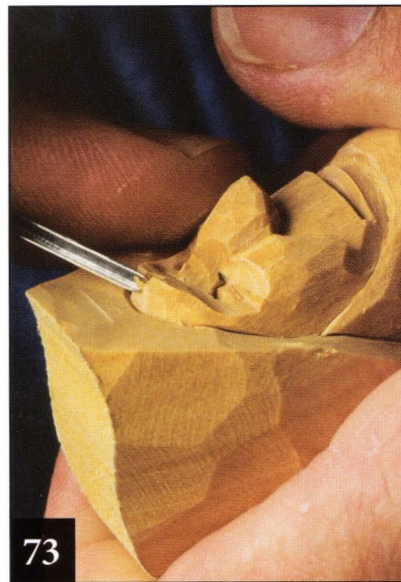
Now trim and clean up the edges around the eyeballs to round the eyeballs.



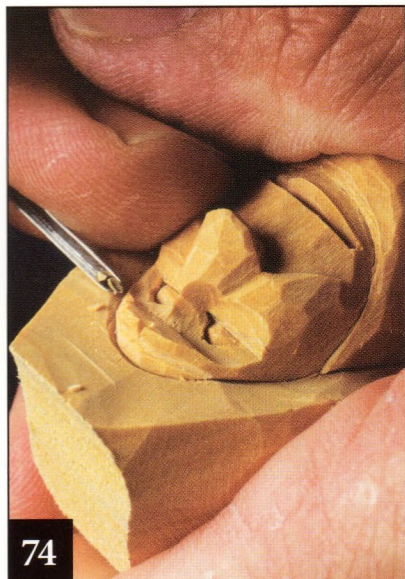
Check the proportion of the eyes. You can still do a little trimming if the eyes do not quite match.



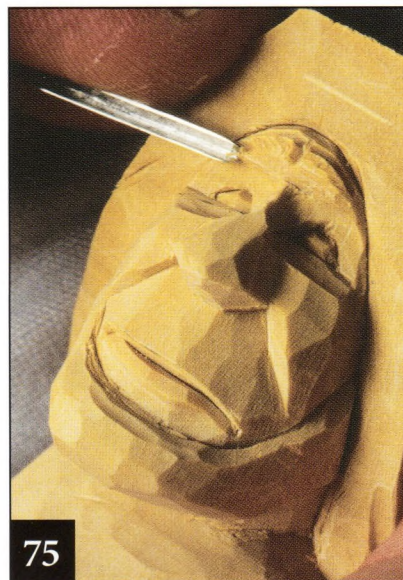
With the $\frac{1}{16}$ " (2mm) V-tool, make a cut right between the eyes to separate the eyebrows.



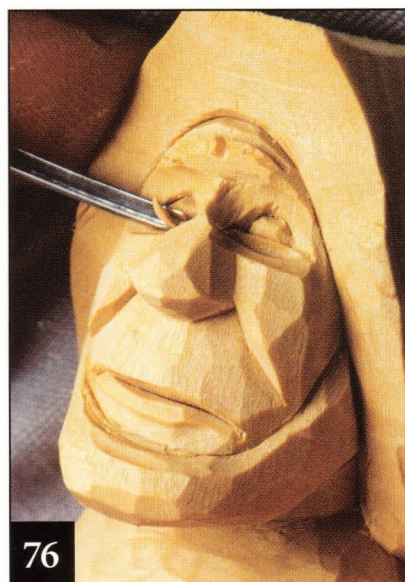
Make a cut across the top of the eyebrows.



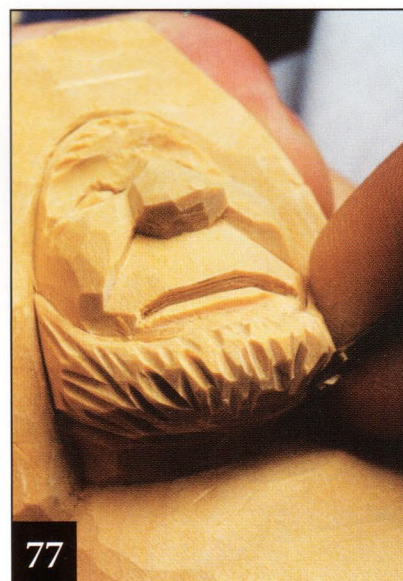
Make the cut deep enough to raise the eyebrows off the face.



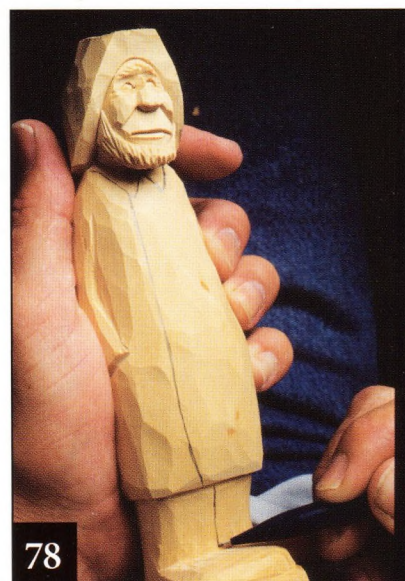
Make small cuts in the eyebrows to create lines for the eyebrow hair.



To complete the lower eyelid, make a cut just under the lower eyelid. There's no need to make an upper eyelid. Just a simple line cut across will form the lower eyelid.



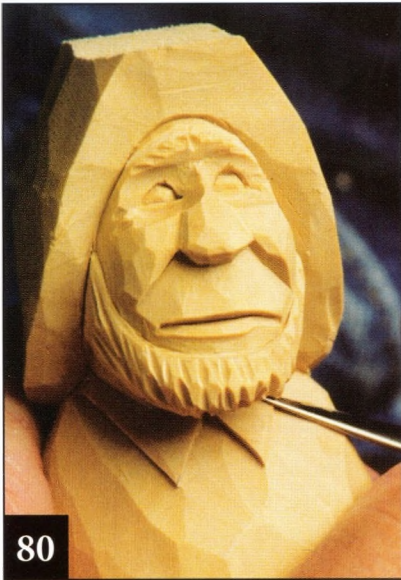
Now cut small lines to make beard hair. Make the cuts different lengths. Some lines should be made wavy to give the illusion of real hair or whiskers.



Pencil on the coat line to one side or the other. Draw a simple collar and pencil on the line separating the boots.



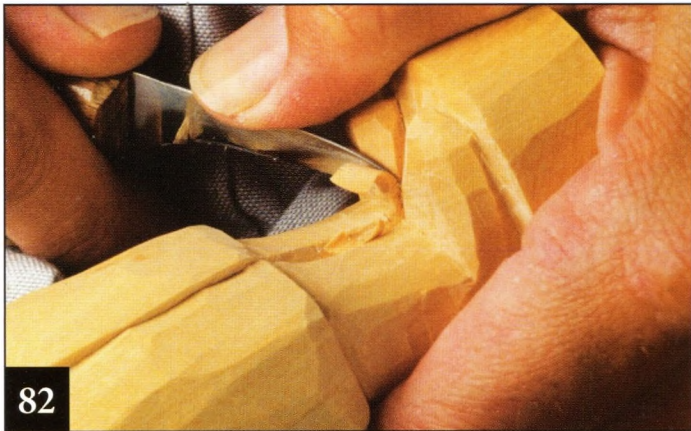
Cut straight into the lines of the collar and the coat. Remove wood next to the lines to raise the collar above the coat.



Notice the collar is just a simple V shape. The rest of the collar will disappear up under the hat brim.



Remove some wood along the coat opening to slightly raise it above the coat.



First separate the boots with a V-tool, then use a knife to clean up. Continue rounding the boots until they are well shaped and proportional on each side.



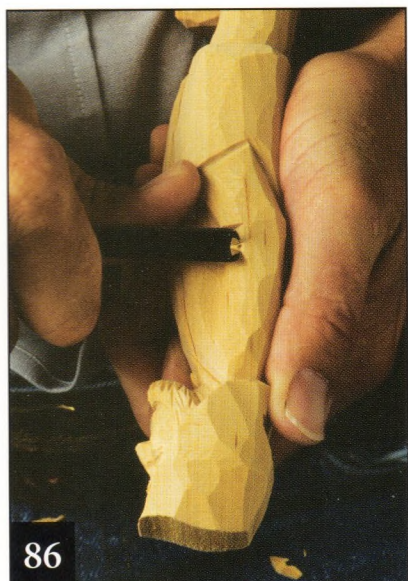
Cut a shallow line in the back of the piece to separate the boots.



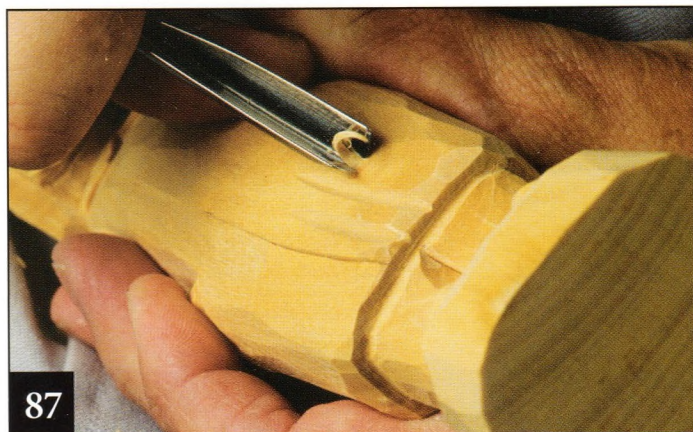
Now the boots are pretty well shaped. Remember, they don't have to be perfect; they are just large, loose-fitting rubber boots. Round the top edge of the base with a knife.



Use a large V-tool to do some final cleanup around the arms. Do any additional cleanup on the arms to make sure they match.



The arms should be slightly bent at the elbows. Make two or three cuts at each arm bend to make wrinkles in the sleeve.



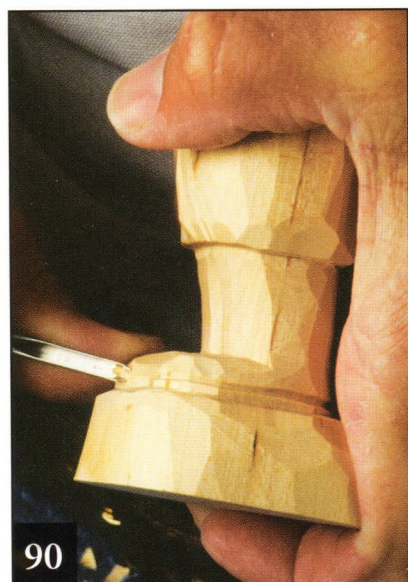
On the front at the bottom of the coat, make three or four bold cuts to make folds or wrinkles in the coat. Do the same on the back at the bottom of the coat.



With the bench knife, finish the hat. Leave the brim large. The hat should appear droopy.



With the hat pretty well finished, notice the wide brim.



With a $\frac{1}{16}$ " (2mm) V-tool, cut around the boots to make boot soles.



Make a few bold cuts in various places around the boots to make wrinkles.



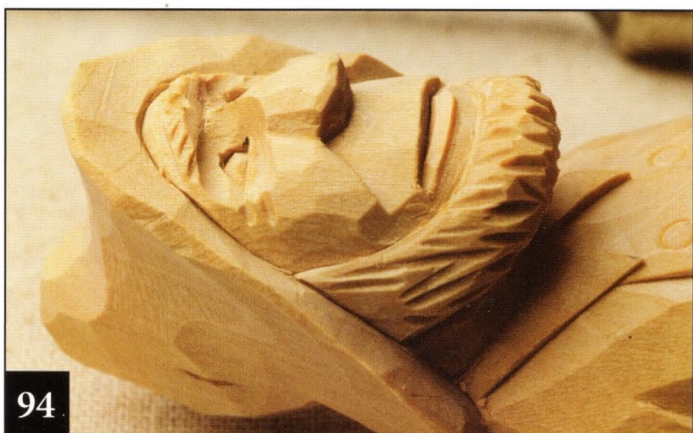
92

With a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) eye punch, make the buttons on the coat. Punch two rows of four buttons. Apply just enough pressure to make a visible circle. You can cut the buttons with a knife tip, but the eye punch is much faster and easier.



93

Now here's the best part: sign the piece with a small V-tool.



94

With the small V-tool, cut some crow's feet at the outside corners of the eyes. You might want to experiment and cut some wrinkles in other places, such as around the mouth.



95

With an awl, punch a hole at the corner of the mouth for the pipe.



96

Carve the pipe with a knife until you are happy with the shape. Insert the pipe in the mouth, but don't glue it yet. You might have to adjust the hole or the pipe stem to get a good fit.



97

The carving is done. Check the captain over to see if he needs any minor adjustments. Finally, sand the piece lightly with 220-grit, very fine sandpaper to remove any surface dirt and give the piece a worn look.



Chapter Two

Painting the Old Sea Captain

Before You Begin

I used acrylic paints thinned with water to paint the old sea captain. I thinned the paint down to almost a wash or water color.

Acrylics are very versatile. The great thing about acrylics is that you can thin them to any shade you want. Just use your imagination. I've tried acrylic paints from the very expensive all the way down to the inexpensive craft paints and have been very happy with the all the results. The cheaper paints seem to have a larger variety of colors than the more expensive brands. I use small bottles and keep the colors mixed at all times.

Be aware that a little bit of paint goes a long way. When you brush on the paint, you will have to blend it around on the wood to get good, even coverage. If you just brush it on, the paint will look light, dark or streaky. Shake the paint container periodically. Some colors tend to separate after a few minutes. Also, note that acrylics dry very quickly; I can paint an entire piece without waiting for the paint to dry.

I use pure red sable brushes. The red sable brushes seem to last better than most brushes. Just be sure to clean them well with water after every use. I'm still experimenting with the different brands; the tips of some brands fray after only a few uses.



Use white for the eyeballs and a 4/0 spotter brush. There's not much room to paint, so take care not to paint the eyelids.

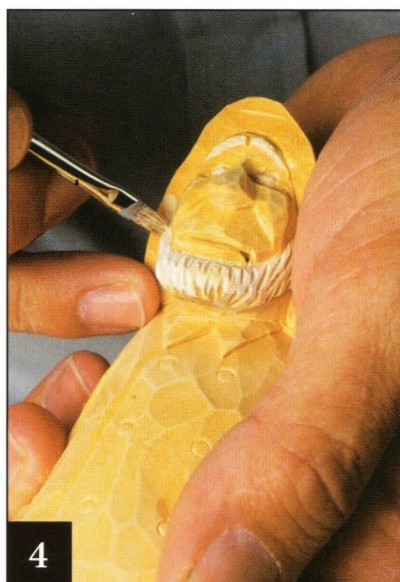


With the same spotter brush, paint the eyebrows white.

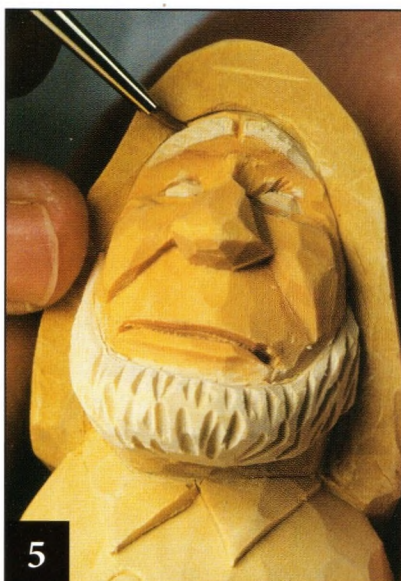




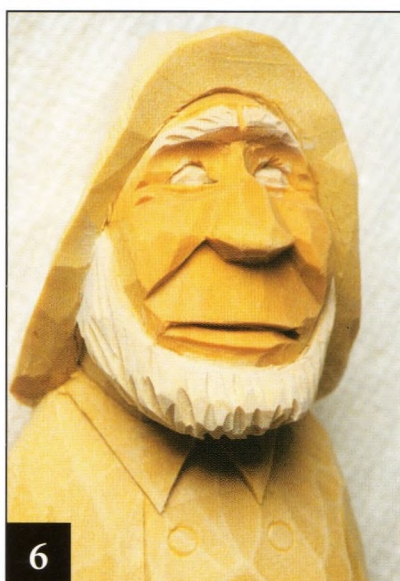
Paint the beard white with a #2 shader brush.



Work the paint into the whiskers.



Now that we're finished with white on the face, it's time for some skin color. There are several shades that can be used for skin color. I use flesh. Paint the color on the face with the #2 shader.



You might want to use a smaller brush when putting flesh color around the eyes and eyebrows. We're finished with the face for now.



Paint the coat and the hat with medium yellow and a #6 shader brush. When painting this much surface, blend the paint on the wood to get good, even coverage.



Paint the boots with black and the #6 shader.



Looking good. So far, we've used a 4/0 spotter brush, a #2 shader brush, and a #6 shader brush.



Paint the eyes with a spotter brush and black straight from the tube. Just dab a small dot on the eyeball and gently expand the dot until the eye looks natural and relaxed, not bug-eyed.



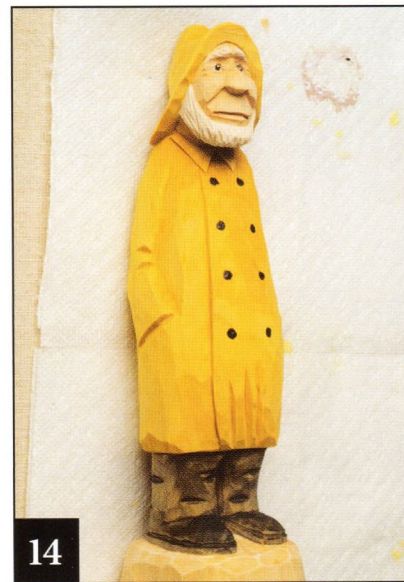
Paint both eyes and check for a match. Make any adjustments needed to make the eyes the same size.



With the black, paint the buttons. You should be able to paint the imprint left by the eye punch quite easily. Paint eight buttons. Be careful: the buttons are very easy to smear.



With white straight from the tube, use a toothpick to place a very small white dot on the black eye to highlight the eyeball. Oops, I told you the buttons were easy to smear. Pardon me while I go back and correct my mistake.



Now the captain is painted and ready to stain.



Chapter Three

Staining the Old Sea Captain

Before You Begin

After you paint a piece with acrylics, notice how the colors have a bright and dry appearance. A stain will soften the colors. There are a lot of stains and finishes that you can use. I've tried most all of them; I even made my own with walnut hulls. That worked well until it started to ferment (no, I didn't drink it).

Now I use a homemade mix of boiled linseed oil and a small amount of raw umber oil paint. This works quite well and doesn't ferment. I mix it in a quart-sized container. Remember to go easy with the raw umber oil paint; a little bit goes a long way. The stain requires a lot of shaking to get a good mix, but it's worth the effort. Another added benefit of the stain is that the linseed oil will practically make the carving waterproof. When carvings sit on a shelf, they gather dust. With a linseed oil finish, I can just wash the carvings under the sink faucet. After a piece is stained, the linseed oil will smell for a short time.

You can paint the stain on or, if the carving is small enough, just dip it in the stain and towel it dry with a paper towel. If you wish to brush the stain on, use any kind of brush with fairly soft bristles. Cleanup can be done with paint thinner or mineral spirits.

For this project, we'll be dipping the Old Sea Captain.

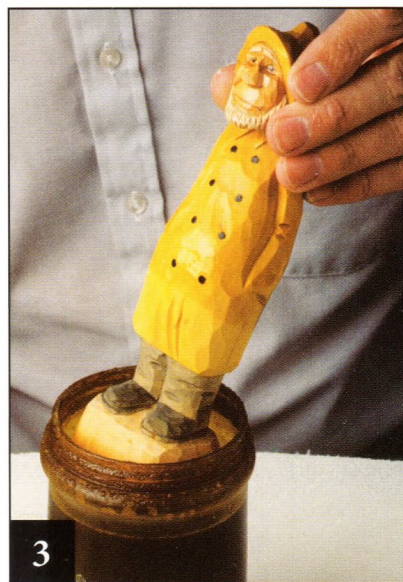


Usually the captain stands on deck and stays dry, but this time he's going to get dunked. Shake the stain well and just dunk him in.

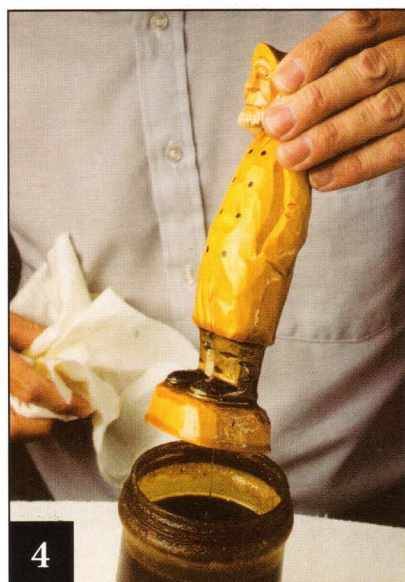




Let the excess stain drip off for a minute.



Then turn the captain over and dunk the other half.



Again, let the excess drip off. Next, dip the pipe.



Towel the captain dry with paper towels, and as simple as that, the staining is done.



The captain is ready for a smoke, so it's time for the pipe. With the awl, re-punch the hole in the corner of the mouth. Dab a small amount of wood glue on the pipe stem and insert the pipe. Hold the pipe in place for a minute until the glue sets.



Now it's time to sit back and enjoy our finished piece. You can use the patterns in Chapter Five to carve first and second mates for the captain. The information in Chapter Four gives you tips on creating lobster traps, buoys, and other accessories for the captain and his crew.



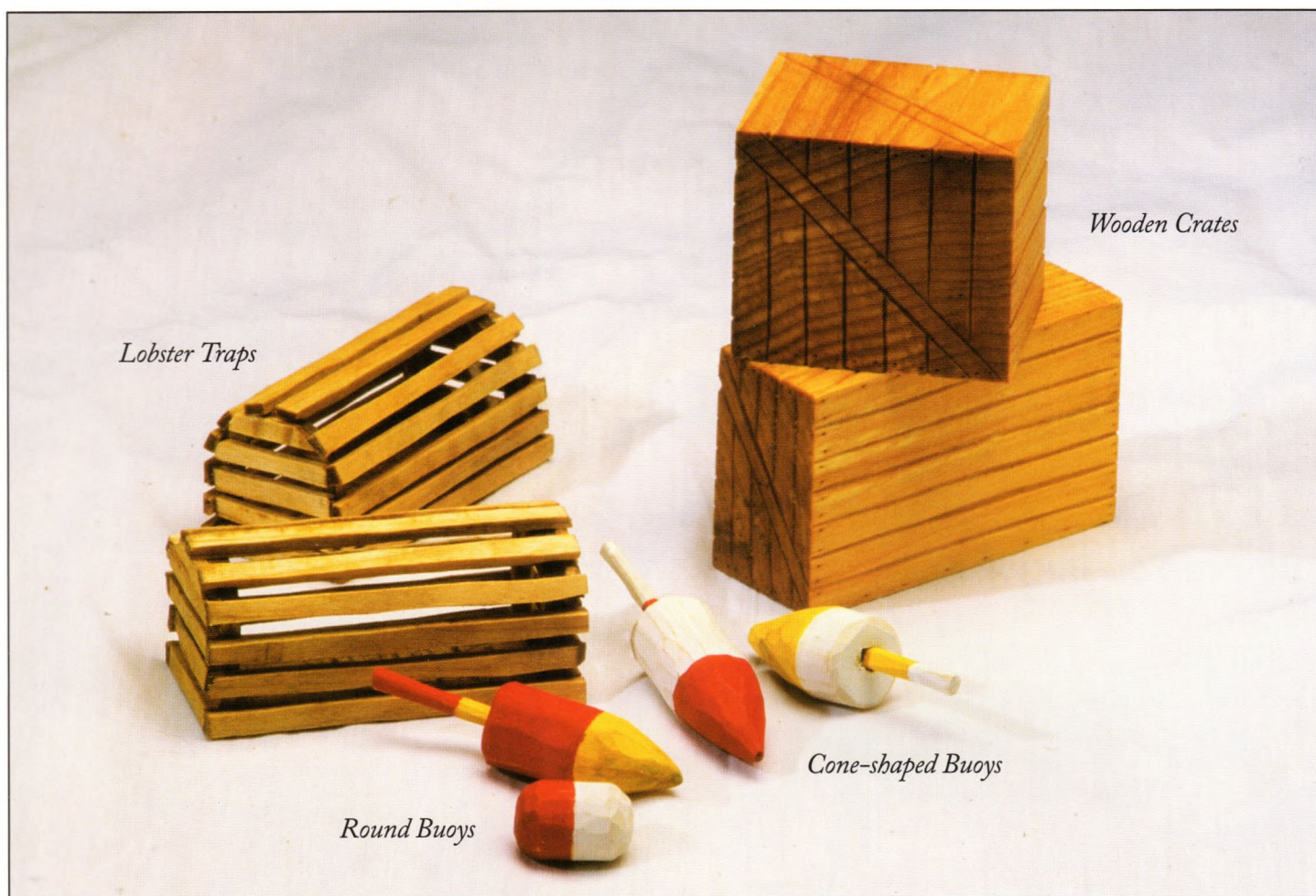
Chapter Four

Carving Buoys, Lobster Traps & Oars

Before You Begin

Carving some accessories for the old sea captain and his crewmembers will help to make any scene you create look more realistic. On the following page, I've included some brief instructions for carving lobster traps, two kinds of buoys, wooden crates, and oars. You may want to take it a little further and carve some dock posts or flooring planks and even add a mesh net to the scene.





Lobster Traps

Wooden Crates

Round Buoys

Cone-shaped Buoys

Lobster Traps

The lobster traps are the hardest and most time-consuming accessories to make. I made these traps from scrap pieces of wood. Lobster traps should look old and weathered, so every piece does not have to be perfect. These traps are 3¼" long, 1½" wide, and 1½" high (8.5 x 4 x 4cm). The bottom is solid. The strips or slats can be slightly wider than ⅛" (0.3cm). I cut everything on a band saw. The frames for each end are U-shaped. Start by gluing the end frames to the bottom, then start gluing the slats from the bottom to the top. It takes a lot of time to make a lobster trap, but the trap will really add to the scene.

Wooden Crates

The wooden crates are just blocks of wood with some added details. I carved on boards and used a punch for the nail holes. You can make the crates any size you want.

Cone-shaped Buoys

The long, cone-shaped buoys are 1½" to 2" (4 to 5cm) long. Just bring a cylinder-shaped piece of wood to a cone on one end. Leave the other end flat. Drill a small hole in the center of the flat end, sharpen a short piece of rounded wood, add some glue, and insert the wood into the hole. As you can see, you can paint the buoys any color you like. They are usually painted half one color and half another color.

Round Buoys

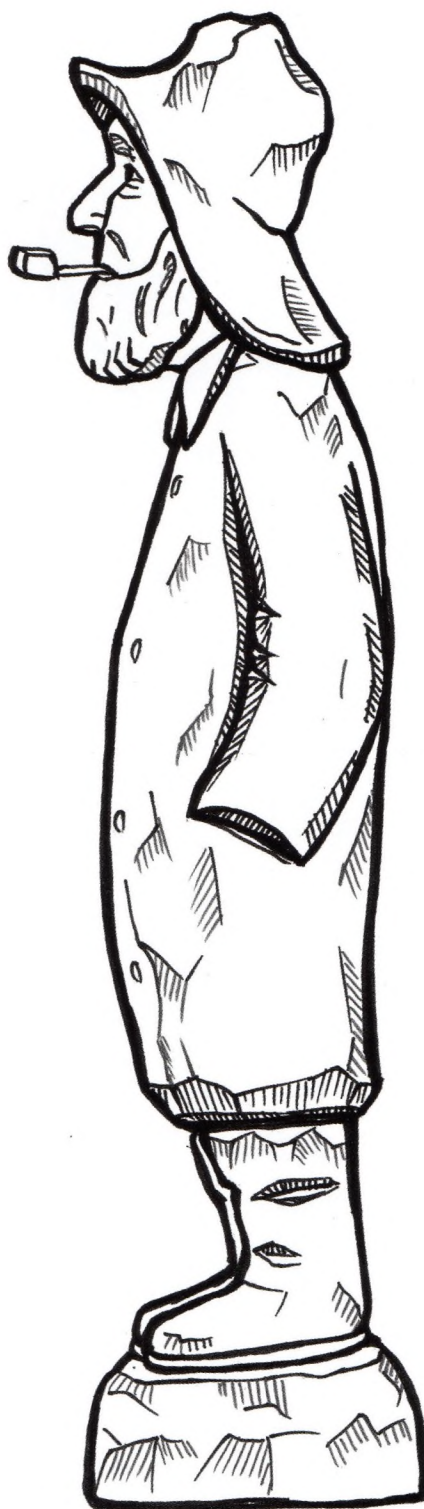
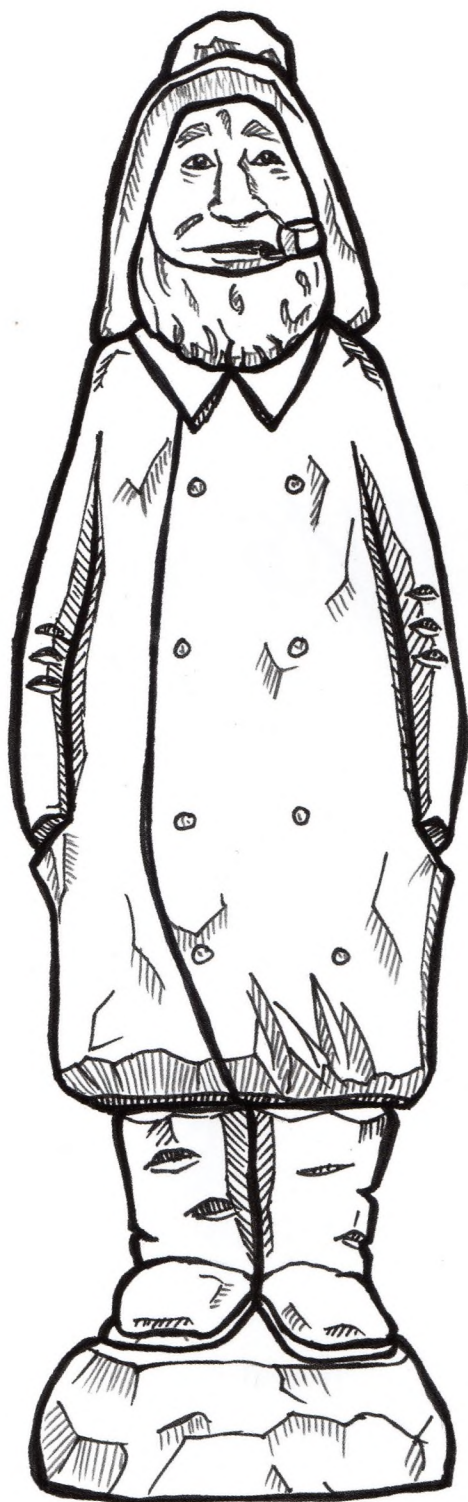
The small, round buoys can be any size. Just round both ends, paint them half red and half white, and dip them in the stain.

Oars (not pictured)

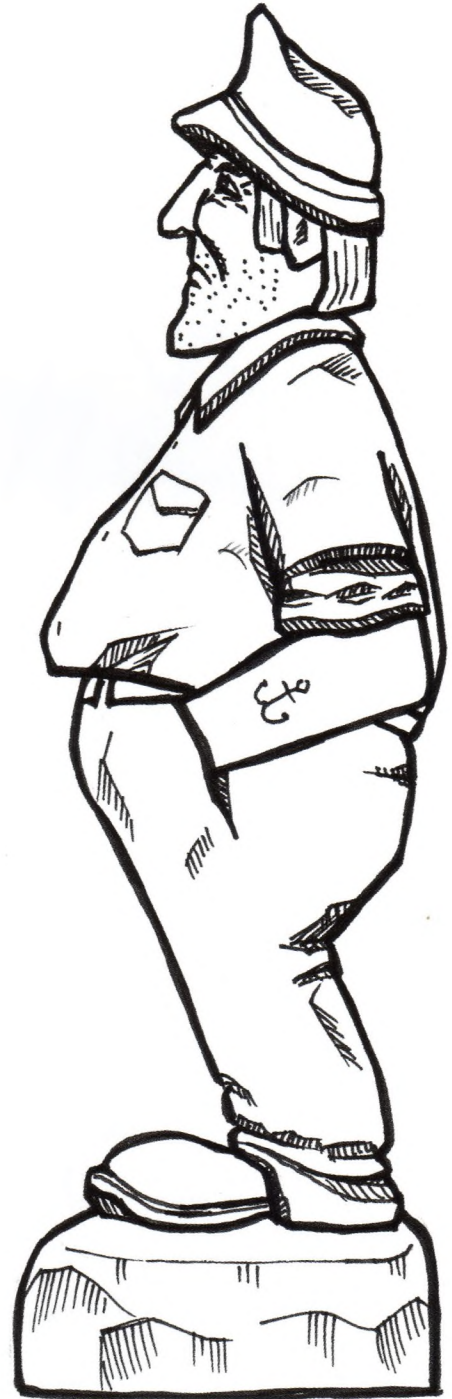
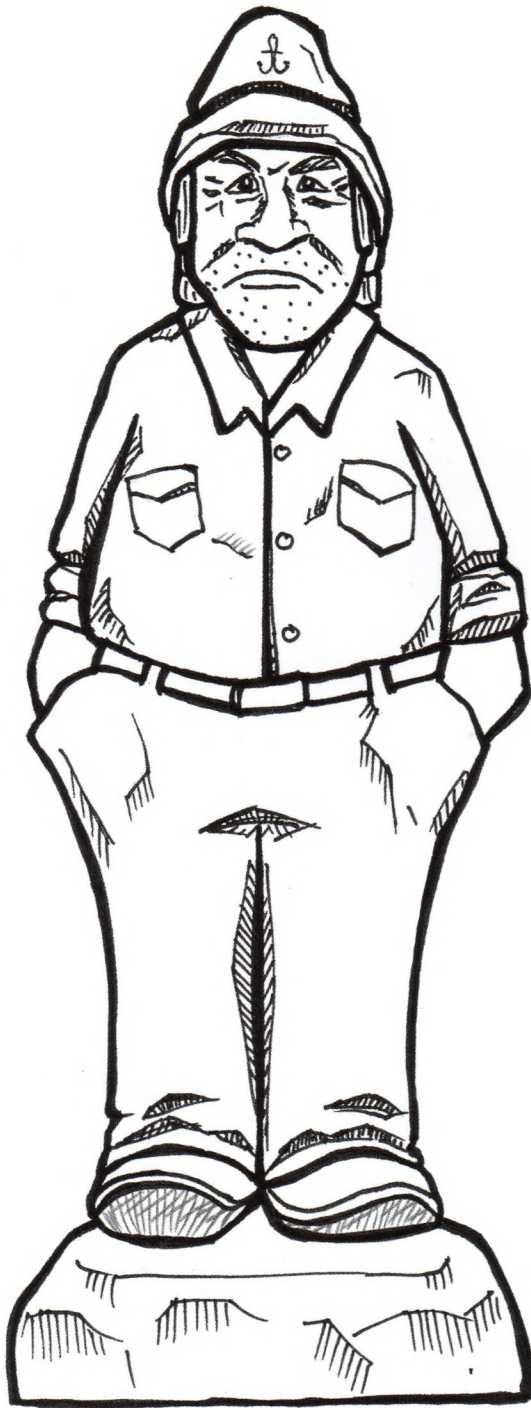
Oars add a nice touch and they are very easy to make. They will be ⅛" to ¼" (0.3 to 0.6cm) thick. I paint mine with very thin, dark green paint and dip them in stain. You could also skip the paint and just dip them in the stain. You can see oars on page 10.

Patterns

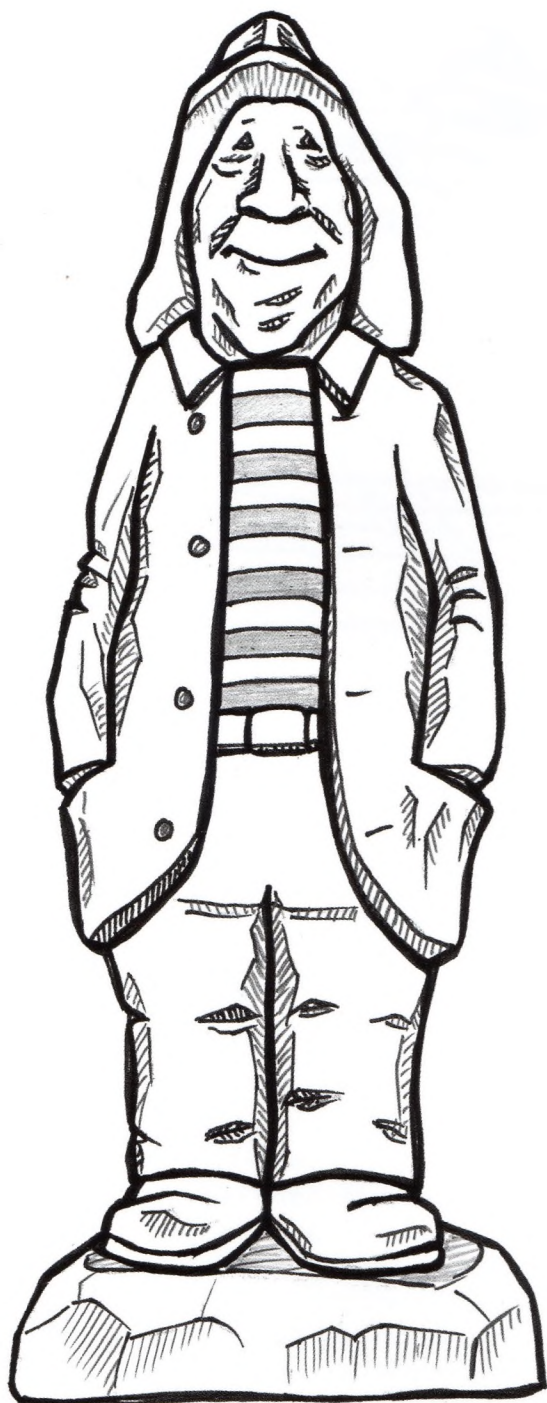
The Old Sea Captain



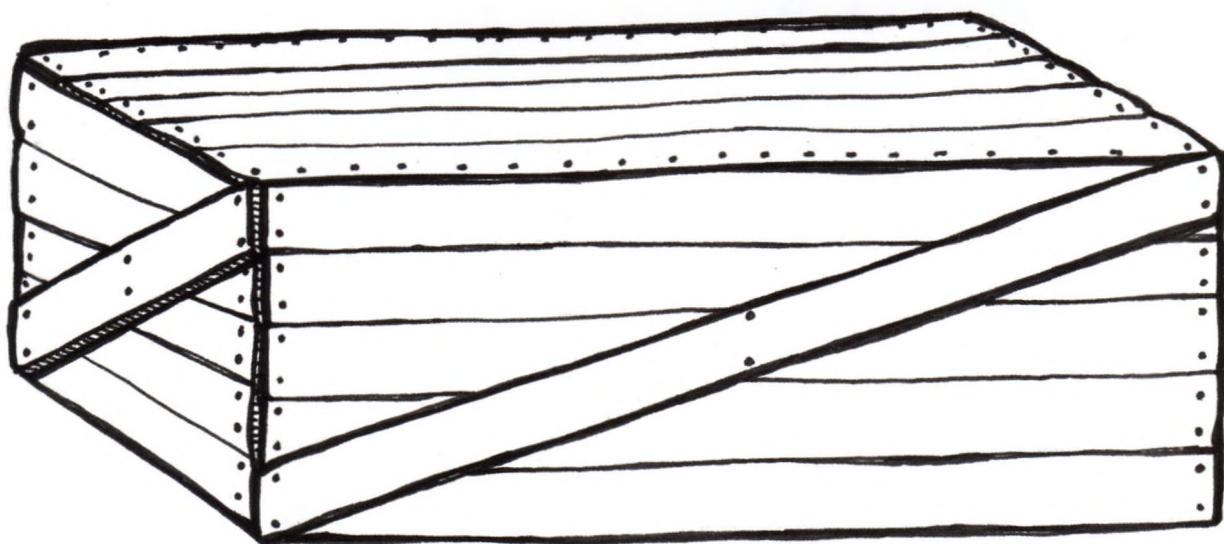
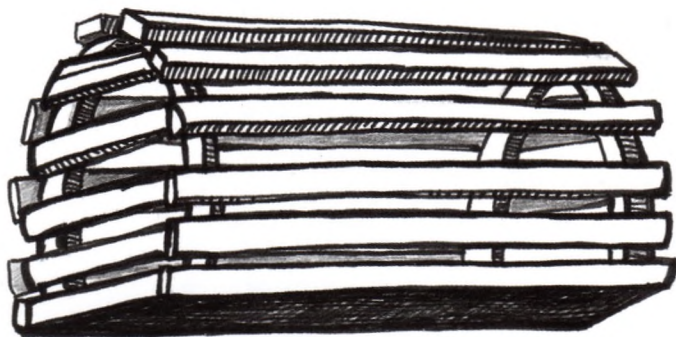
The First Mate



The Second Mate



Lobster Traps & Crates

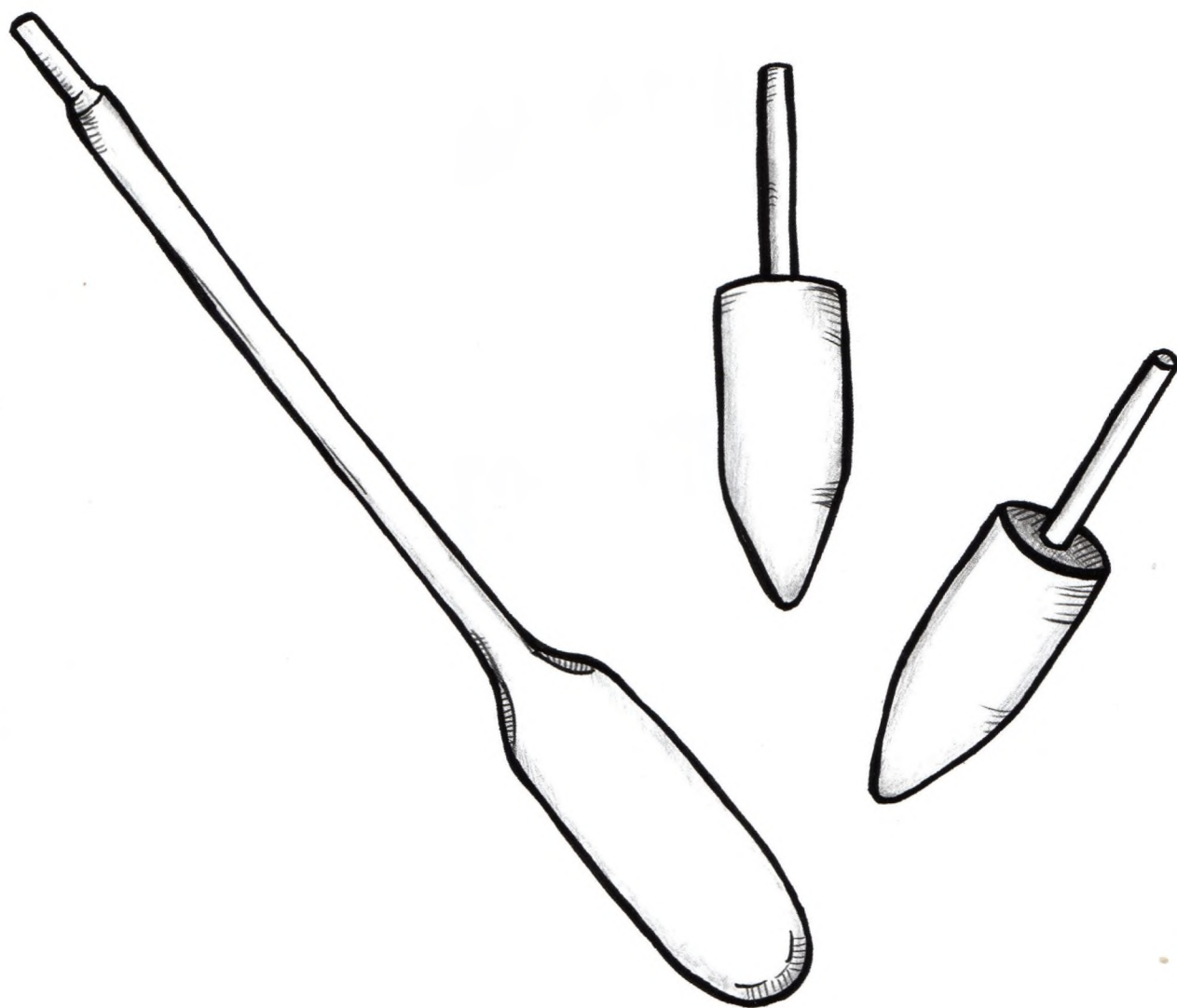


The lobster trap is hard to make, but it will be worth the trouble when it's finished. Make the trap from small strips of wood approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ " (0.3cm) thick. Remember, a lobster trap should look old and probably in need of repair, so the strips don't have to be cut perfectly. Make the trap $3\frac{1}{4}$ " long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ " high (8.5 x 4 x 4cm). The bottom is solid. All pieces are $\frac{1}{8}$ " (0.3cm) thick; the strips or slats can be slightly wider than $\frac{1}{8}$ " (0.3cm). I cut everything on a band saw and clean up with a knife. The frame for each end is U-shaped. Start with the end frames

and glue them to the bottom. Then start gluing the slats from the bottom to the top. Don't worry about gluing them all perfectly straight—it will look more realistic if some of the slats are crooked. When the glue is dry, dip the trap in stain and towel dry.

The crate is very easy to make. It is simply a block of wood with the boards indicated by carved lines. I use a small V-tool to make the lines and punch the nail holes with an awl. Make the crate any size you want. To finish the crate, dip it in stain and towel dry.

Buoys & Oars

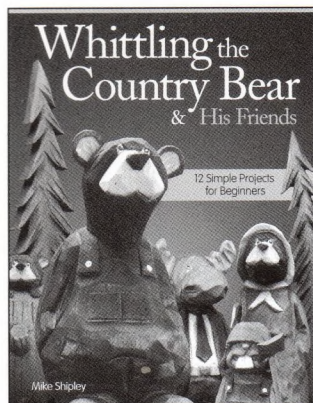


To make the oars, start with a thin piece of wood that is 7" long, $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick, and $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide (18 x 0.6 x 2cm). Don't worry about carving them perfectly: oars should look worn and weathered. Sand them with fine sandpaper and paint them with a thin, dark green paint. When the paint is dry, dip the oars in stain and towel them dry.

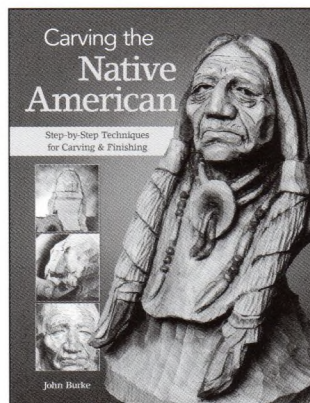
To make the cone-shaped buoys, cut a block $1\frac{3}{4}$ " (4.5cm) long and $\frac{3}{4}$ " (2cm) square. Just round the block,

bringing it to a cone on one end and leaving the other end flat. Drill a small hole in the center of the flat end, sharpen a short piece of rounded wood, and insert it into the hole. Sand the buoy with fine sandpaper to give it a worn look. This type of buoy is usually painted half one color and half another color. You can use any colors you'd like to paint the buoys. Use the same painting and staining techniques that we used on the sea captain and his crew.

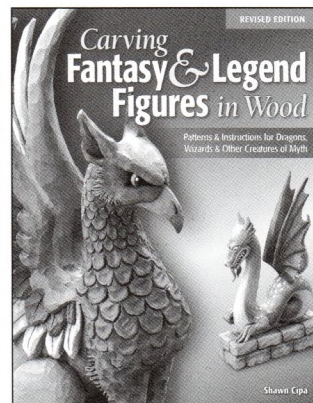
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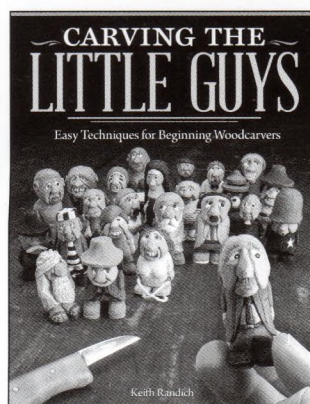
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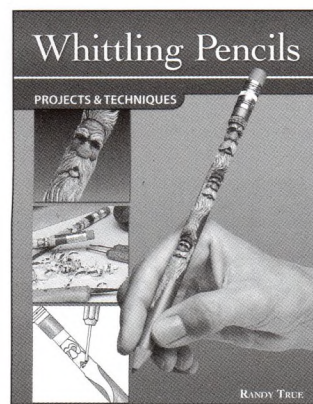
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The Old Sea Captain, page 4



The First Mate, page 6



The Second Mate, page 8