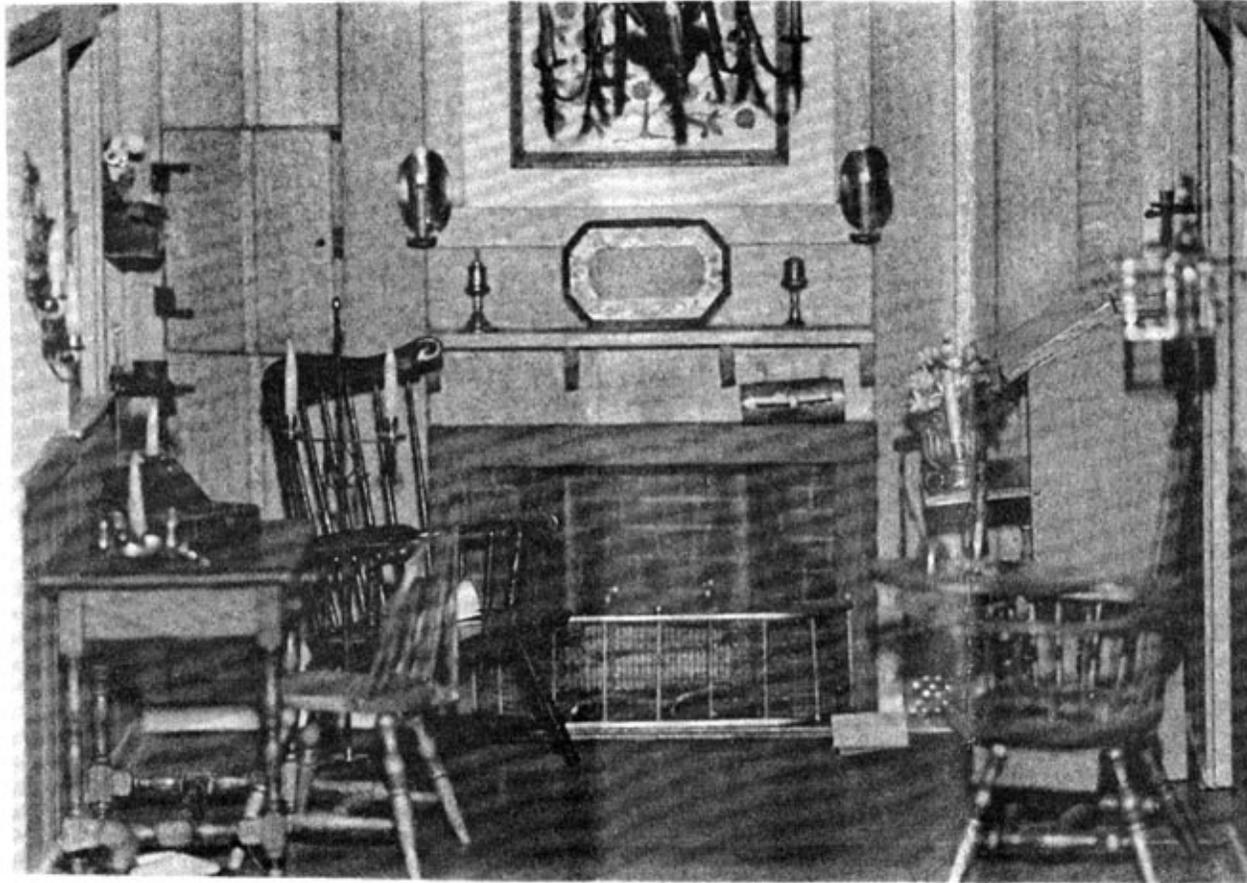


It's A Small World



This is the comfortable period room you might step into if you could shrink to five or six inches.

How often have you wished you had a room furnished perfectly in authentic early American pieces?

Imagine that you have imitated Alice in Wonderland and have shrunk to five or six inches in height. You could step into such a room. A handsome chandelier would hang above you. You could poke up the fire with brass fire tongs and poker after moving the handsome brass screen. On the mantel you'd find two brass candlesticks holding red candles, and a Jefferson chair, bearing a tiny pewter inkstand, writing materials and even

minute bifocals on its writing arm would invite you to pause.

You would be part of the miniature world created by Peggy and Bill Birkemeier of Southern Shores.

"Studio B Miniatures" is a home based operation which has grown out of a hobby. The tiny creations of the Birkemeiers are no products of a hobby kit, however; they are finely crafted, painstakingly detailed and accurate reproductions of antique tin and brassware, scaled one inch to the foot.

Seeing the four small rooms in which their pieces are displayed is a rare experience, like suddenly looking through the wrong end of the telescope.

One room is furnished with all kinds of lighting fixtures — chandeliers, floor lamps, lanterns, wall sconces — all accurate reproductions of early American items but all wired in 20th century style, with 12-volt, quarter inch size bulbs. Lighted up, the minute fixtures almost take one's breath away.

Another room is a tin shop with floor to ceiling shelves bearing coffee pots, mugs, watering cans, boxes and dozens of other utensils and equipment, many of which are painted in authentic design and color. Many are so small that it is necessary to use tweezers to remove them from the shelf.

A pierced tin lantern, perhaps an inch high, has a tiny door and clasp which opens to reveal a candle no more than half an inch tall inside. Peggy Birkemeier makes the diminutive tapers in an authentic candle mold. A foot warmer has an elaborate wooden frame and handsome latch. A money box holds tiny coins and a plate full of cookies stands next to the one-eighth inch cookie cutters from which they were made.

The period furniture in the charming den is made by the other half of Studio B, Bill Birkemeier's father Bob and his mother Millie. Bob makes the furniture reproductions while Millie finishes them.

Finally, in the kitchen are more furniture pieces by the elder Birkemeier, many utensils by the younger couple, and ceramic jugs, bean pots, plates and cups and a washbowl and pitcher made by a friend.

"Miniature collecting is a growing hobby," Peggy Birkemeier said. "It's becoming very



The tin shop shelves are well stocked with plain and fancy ware, all scaled one inch to the foot.

popular." She added that "it's sort of folksie. People get involved in what you're doing and you get to know them and what they're collecting." Customers become friends, she said.

"We're 16 months behind on our orders," said Bill. "So we're not going to any shows for a

while." He said they had hoped to keep the miniature creating as a hobby — to work without pressure. But it's hard. There is such a demand. And, of course, Studio B work is such perfection.

The elder Birkemeier began working on miniatures when Bill's sister was young. "He's always dabbled in it," Bill said. Watching his father work on the small details, Bill became interested, particularly in tin and brass. When Peggy joined the family, she joined the "hobby."

"We started on a typing table," they said. Now they've moved to one of the downstairs rooms in their Southern Shores house. They share the room with their three-year-old daughter's toys.

Two lathes, racks of fine tools, a soldering iron and a chest of material rising from the big work table occupies the workshop half of the room. Dominating the table is a powerful lighted magnifying glass. "A necessity," they both laughed.

"We've outgrown the typing table, as you can see," Bill said. He puts in many hours a week at the big work area, "whenever I'm not being a father or working at the Army Corps Research Pier." Bill is a coastal engineer assigned to the pier after working at Corps headquarters in Virginia.

Peggy puts in her hours when not taking care of the house or her daughter.

"We've learned a lot," they said. Now, when they go to Williamsburg, or Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, or any other museum, they know what they want to see. "We study the andirons in the collection, or chandeliers, or whatever. We research everything we make.

"What those early craftsmen were able to do



Peggy and Bill Birkemeier stand before their "small world" of miniature antique reproductions.

is fascinating," they said.

What the present day craftsmen at Studio B are able to do in miniature is more than fascinating. It's incredible.

And to think that miniature collecting is going now to a scale of one half inch per foot! What a very small world.