

# Warm Feelings Inside





In front of a window in the Harmans' keeping room stands a German horse pull-toy from the 1890s. The large cupboard in original blue milk paint is one of Hazel's favorite pieces, likely from the mid-1800s. A late-19th-Century pie safe sits below part of Hazel's sampler collection, with the one in the black frame dating to 1733. A variety of early 1800s Windsor chairs surround the dining table, which is a later 19th-Century piece. On top are McLoughlin Brothers blocks from the 1890s.

BY GREGORY LEFEVER  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY WINFIELD ROSS

THE HOME OF HAZEL AND HARRY HARMAN IN VIRGINIA'S BLUE RIDGE REGION IS THE CULMINATION OF SEVERAL DREAMS COME TRUE.



The moon and stars blaze out of the night sky above a secluded cabin on the rug that hangs on the wall of Hazel Harman's sewing room. In bold letters it announces: Dreams Come True.

"I saw that rug in an antiques shop in Ohio years ago and had to have it," Hazel recalled. "I look around me at this house and I know the sentiment is right. Dreams do come true."

For Hazel and Harry Harman, achieving that dream was neither easy nor fast, taking some forty years of scrimping, saving, and traveling back and forth countless times from New England to Florida and into the Midwest in search of outstanding country antiques to furnish the home they built in 1989. But for as long as they've traveled, they always found their way home—the reproduction saltbox they live in today in Boones Mill, Virginia, is only 20 miles from the farm where Hazel grew up in Ferrum and just 40 miles from the dairy farm where Harry was raised in Floyd.

They call their home Woolly-sheep Farm. Set amid the wooded foothills of Franklin County at the southern end of the Shenandoah Valley, the Harmans' house faces rolling fields—pasture for their sheep—that lead to the hazy, crinkled edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the western horizon.

More than a farm, Hazel runs two businesses there. One is her antiques business and the other is her rug hooking business, which includes selling rugs and hooking supplies as well as teaching classes. She hopes that someday her sheep will become her business partners in a sort of woolly way.

The farm also reflects Hazel's lifelong fondness for antiques. "I had an uncle who was a bachelor, and he lived on my parents' farm. His house was filled with antiques, and we'd go down to visit him," she said. "I was only about eight or nine years old and already I wanted to collect antiques and I'd say, 'Uncle Will, can I have that?' And he'd say, 'Yes, go





Hazel's upstairs sewing room contains her favorite wool pieces as well as her collection of antique sewing items. The "Dreams Come True" antique hooked rug is from Ohio, and the double-spoked yarn winder is from Pennsylvania. The late-1800s jelly cupboard conceals a television set.

ahead, you can take it.' So I began with several things that came from my father's family because Uncle Will would let me take them. I've liked anything that was old from the time I was pretty young."

It's the same with her love of textiles. "When I was growing up, my mother made quilts—wonderful quilts—and she taught me how to make them," Hazel explained. "Since then, I've done every kind of fiber art that's crossed my way. I've done knitting, crocheting, and quilting, but I didn't discover rug hooking until 1996. Again, it's that connection with the fiber. Rug hooking has a real connection with history—it gives me a warm feeling."

That warm feeling is important to Hazel. She mentions it whenever she describes her farmhouse or its furnishings. To her, it's the feeling of home, the countryside where she grew up, and America.

America is important to her, too. The many antique furniture pieces the couple has collected are American—the only exception being a couple of 18th-Century samplers

from England.

Her decorating reflects her love of that warm feeling. She painted the inside of her home a muted mustard throughout. The golden-stained wide-plank floorboards echo the warmth.

When she decorates at Christmas, Hazel adds a flavor of American folk art with tattered pieces of old quilts, rusted sleigh bells, and faded garlands. "I like the decorations to be grungy and to look like children made them," she noted. "They're all handmade and they have a warm feeling."

"It's that connection with the fiber. Rug hooking has a real connection with history—it gives me a warm feeling."

#### COLLECTING FAR AND WIDE

About forty years ago, Hazel got that warm feeling at a square dance when a sailor stepped over and asked her to dance—a bold move, considering Hazel was there with a date. Harry, who grew up on his family's farm—his great-grandfather bought

it in the 1870s—had enlisted in the Navy. Hazel was studying at Ferrum College in her home town. That dance made them partners for the rest of their lives.

After Harry and Hazel married, they settled in Roanoke, the largest city in the Blue Ridge area with more than 90,000 people. Harry spent the next thirty-nine years working clerical positions with the Norfolk & Western Railroad (which merged into the Norfolk Southern Railway in the 1980s). Hazel took a job, too, but at the local electrical company (which eventually became part of American Electric Power), where she spent thirty-seven years.

"In our era, our parents raised us that if you got a good job, you kept it," Hazel said, laughing. "And we both had good jobs, so we kept them."

During their sixteen years in Roanoke, the couple lived in one ranch-style home and then another while accumulating furniture and collectibles.

"There's a wooden churn sitting in the buttery and it's one of my all-time favorite pieces," Hazel said. "We hadn't been married all that long and hadn't been working very

long, so we really couldn't afford it. But Harry went out of his way to get it for me, to surprise me with it on our anniversary. He knew I liked that sort of thing and he's kept up with it."

Harry—as one of the countless anonymous husbands whose wives divide their love between their menfolk and antiques—paid his dues.

"Actually, I would nag him," Hazel admitted. "Can we go to New England? Can we go to Pennsylvania? Can we go to Ohio? A lot of the time he might not be interested in the



big shows or the shops, so he'd sit in the car and read a book."

Harry admits he has consumed libraries. When we asked Hazel whether she preferred antiques shows, shops, estate sales, or auctions, Harry answered for her—"Yes."

Many who have spent decades collecting antique furniture have experienced an evolution, starting with less-expensive Victoriana then trading up to rarer early American pieces, moving from glossy restored finishes to scarcer original finishes. Not Hazel.

"No, I started out with the type of thing I have now," she said. "Back then I called them 'country antiques'—a lot of people today use the word 'primitive' for them—but to me they've always been the pieces you'd find in a country home. I've been drawn to the pie safes and old farm tables and jelly cupboards for as long as I can remember."

### BRETHREN BUILDERS

By the mid-1980s the Harmans were ready for a new home—a place away from the city's commotion with enough space to comfortably display

their antique furniture and collections as well as accommodate the rug hooking and antiques businesses, and enough land to spread out and, perhaps, raise farm animals. In other words, they were ready for Woollysheep Farm.

Both Hazel and Harry loved the look of older homes, so they selected a New England saltbox plan from McKie Wing Roth Jr., noted designer of reproduction 18th- and 19th-Century American homes. "The house was divided into a lot more rooms than we wanted because we don't have children and we just



The front of the Harmans' saltbox reproduction faces east (inset). The back shows the Blue Ridge Mountains on the horizon. The main portion of the house was built in 1989, followed by the garage and an additional storage area in 2005.







This folk-art muslin deer comes from Curry's Antiques of Lancaster, Ohio, and is surrounded by holiday greenery atop a 19th-Century cupboard from Gallipolis, Ohio.

The two-drawer piece sitting on the chest of drawers is one of Harry's family heirlooms. It originally was the top of a pie safe sitting on the Harman family front porch during the Civil War. A Union scouting party spotted it and wanted the pies it held. When they discovered the piece was locked, one of the Yankees split open the drawer with his ax and took the pie. This top piece was unfortunately separated from the bottom of the pie safe a few generations back.





The corner cupboard in the keeping room is an early-1800s piece that has been in Harry's family for several generations. Hazel's niece, Sharon Brown, hooked the rug hanging on the wall, portraying the Harmans' house and four of their farm animals. The comb-back Windsor chair is c. 1790 from York, Pennsylvania.









wanted some free open space,” Hazel said. “We’d lived in a ranch in the city and now wanted a place with space enough to actually walk.”

They revised the floor plan to eliminate walls and merge rooms together, and that called for additional beams to support where the walls had been. The downstairs changed from a kitchen, study, living room, and bedroom into just a large combination kitchen and keeping room with an attached buttery, guest bedroom, and bathroom. The upstairs changed from three bedrooms and a

laundry room to a master bedroom, sewing room, and bathroom. Hazel devoted the finished basement to her rug hooking classes and supplies.

For the construction, the Harmans looked locally. For 250 years Franklin County has been home to a conservative religious sect called the Old German Baptist Brethren. This separatist sect is related to the post-reformation Anabaptists—which include the Old Order Amish and Mennonites—and arrived in America in the early 1700s. Increasing development of agricultural lands in

the Blue Ridge region has threatened many of their farms, so the German Baptists have turned more toward carpentry work and home building.

“We signed up to have them build our house, and we were on their list for about a year and a half,” Harry said. “They were a delight to work with and made it a fun project for us.”

The builders worked hard, constructing the entire two-storey, 2,100-square-foot house and basement between May and October 1989. Although Harry was still em-

**OPPOSITE** The Harmans' Christmas tree stands in front of the keeping room windows. It is adorned with an assortment of homemade ornaments. At left is a cupboard Harry found at an auction in Gallipolis, Ohio, that houses part of Hazel's extensive pewter collection. Behind the cupboard hangs a c. 1890 quilt.

**OPPOSITE INSETS, FROM TOP** Sheep ornament crafted from homemade paper poured into a chocolate mold and toasted. The Harmans found it in Roanoke, Virginia.

Hazel's friend Debbie Duncan of Crow Creek Farm made this colorful stuffed star.

This bird ornament has an osnaburg body with wings made from a hooked rug that was damaged beyond repair. It sits on a length of the braided garland Hazel wraps around her tree.

A handmade stocking holds a cloth snowman.

The Harmans use the keeping room fireplace all winter. Hazel hooked the rug hanging above it, using an antique flag pattern. The mantel displays several early pewter chargers. A rare leather-bound 1796 Church of England *Book of Common Prayer* Hazel found in Comfort, Texas, sits on the table. She said she loves the patina on the leather binding. Its inscription reads “Promise to John Pitney, Hammond Rock, May 1895.”







The buttery features several of Hazel's collections, including pantry boxes, crocks, seed boxes, and wooden bowls. The centerpiece is the large cupboard and counter the Harmans acquired at Olde Glory in Waynesville, Ohio. The piece is new but artfully distressed by finisher Sally Whims. It conceals a washer, dryer, and water dispenser. Hanging at left above a collection of wooden bowls is an antique butter scale.



**OPPOSITE** The first-floor guest bedroom features a large 19th-Century cupboard Harry bought in Florida and a pencil post bed made by Billy Guilliams, a brother-in-law. Hazel hooked the rugs on the wall and bed using patterns by Edyth O'Neill. The linen coverlet is from Curry's Antiques, and the coverlet at the foot of the bed is from Family Heir-Loom Weavers of Red Lion, Pennsylvania. Tucked alongside the wall is an early low-back Windsor chair.

The stove at the far end of the kitchen is the only contemporary appliance in sight—the rest are concealed behind primitive cabinetry. The early-1800s Pennsylvania cupboard at left displays part of Hazel's pewter collection. The c. 1850 pie safe from Spottsylvania County, Virginia, hides a microwave oven, while an old red cabinet in back disguises the refrigerator. The turn-of-the-century lift-top table functions as a kitchen island. Decorative items include part of Hazel's basket collection, hanging herbs, and Christmas greenery. The home's buttery is visible through the doorway at the rear of the kitchen.



ployed at the time, he took vacation days to watch over the project.

Harry enjoyed working with the German Baptists, especially with their supervisor, Levi Montgomery, now deceased. "He'd always call every morning before they'd start work and ask me, 'Well, are you going to be there today?' He'd call to line things up for the day, as if I knew how things were supposed to go," Harry said. "He'd always do that—let me think these building things were my decision even when they weren't. Thankfully, they weren't. But that's what Levi was like—just a wonderful gentleman."

The Germans, whose culture tends to be more patriarchal than mainstream America's, also took some delight in teasing Harry over the fact that many of the design decisions were Hazel's.

"The builders would ask me about something and then they'd laugh. 'Why're we asking you? You've gotta ask her,'" Harry re-

called, chuckling. "I guess they were letting me know that their wives are not the ones who make the decisions. It was a little bit different, I admit."

A smaller group of the same builders returned to the Harman house in 2005 to build a two-car garage and storage area addition onto the rear of the house. "It was sure good to see them again," Harry said, "and they did another fine job for us on the addition."

### EVERYTHING IN USE

After spending several decades collecting outstanding American country pieces—most dating from the mid-1700s to the late 1800s—Hazel wanted their home to display the antiques, her many collections, and hooked rugs to their best advantage. To create an effective backdrop, the Harmans installed wide-plank flooring and minimized the number of interior paint colors.

Searching for appropriate floorboards eventually took the Harmans

to Stoddard, New Hampshire, and Carlisle Wide Plank Floors. The Harmans worked directly with Dale Carlisle himself and had the boards shipped to Boones Mill, where the German Brethren installed them.

"They did a fine job, with each piece space nailed," Harry said. "We put the boards down plain, with no sanding, just a stain and satin finish, and that was it. The floors turned out beautifully and are quite a conversation piece."

For interior colors, Hazel took the unusual step of painting all wall and ceiling surfaces the same color throughout the house, selecting "Valley Forge Mustard" from Old Village Paints. "I chose the mustard because it goes well with the wood and with the painted furniture we have," she said. "It makes the house look more appropriate to the era."

Despite the age and rarity of several of the pieces, all of the Harmans' furniture is still in use. Visitors sit in the colonial-era chairs.







Hazel hosts sales of seasonal antiques and rug hooking supplies when weather permits in this log building, crafted from two early North Carolina tobacco sheds. Harry built the fieldstone wall around it using stones from the foundation of his great-grandfather's home. Hazel and Billy Guillems built the adjacent potting shed.

Early pie safes and jelly cupboards conceal televisions and a microwave oven. Newer cupboards hide a washer and dryer, refrigerator, and even a bottled-water dispenser.

“I’m sure they think we’re kind of odd.”

“I mentioned about the microwave in a pie safe and the TVs in the jelly cupboards, well, I feel sometimes that those people who used to own these pieces can still see me,” Hazel mused. “I’d like to think it pleases them to know that the things that they treasured, that they took care of, are not going to be used for firewood. And I’d like to think they know that I care enough about the things they preserved that I want to continue using them.”

Harry has a different take on it. “You know the price of TVs has come way down,” he said, smiling, “but the price of things to hide them in has gone way up.”

Harriet’s love of the American primitive look was not shared by the builders. In 2005 Hazel ordered a long, four-section cabinet and countertop from Bea Sparrow of Olde Glory in Waynesville, Ohio, for in their buttery to conceal the washer, dryer, and a water dispenser. She chose a piece by Don and Sally Whims, known for their superbly distressed finishes. The German Brethren workmen were still working on the garage when Harry and his brother hauled the large cabinet from Ohio to the Boones Mill house.

When they saw the large cabinet awaiting installation, “They said, ‘You aren’t going to put that in

there, looking like that, are you?’” Harry recalled with a twinkle in his eye. “They couldn’t quite understand that it was a new piece and Hazel had paid to have it look like that. I’m sure they thought we were kind of odd.”

#### ADDING THE WOOLLY SHEEP

Another part of Hazel’s dream come true was the growth of her rug hooking business. Although rug hooking was a natural extension of her lifelong interest in other fiber arts, moving to the Boones Mill house expanded her opportunities. In addition to leading classes in the basement, she dyes wool and sells hooking supplies. Her upstairs sewing room holds pieces of her extensive collection of fiber-related items and her favorite wools.

“When I started out with my little shop, I ran an ad in a small Vir-



ginia newspaper for primitive antiques and rug hooking and, from that, I got a call," she said. "Now, we have twenty-one members in our Woollysheat rug hooking group, which meets regularly."

The most prominent outbuilding is a log cabin constructed from the logs of two early North Carolina tobacco farms. During the warm season, Hazel moves her antiques and rug hooking businesses into the cabin.

The name of Hazel's business implies a farm, and in one regard she is tied to the land.

"We used to travel a lot more before we retired," she explained. "That's because I'd been nagging for sheep for so long that, once we retired, we finally got them."

They have one Shetland ewe named Buttercup, a rare Jacob ram named Jacob, two miniature donkeys, fifteen chickens, and three

dogs. Hazel hopes to begin spinning yarn from Buttercup's fleece within a year. "Of course now that we're retired and normally would be able to travel a lot more, we can't because of the animals we've collected."

As with everything else at Woollysheat Farm, Harry seems fine with it all—up to a point. "There's just one thing I told her," he said. "I grew up on a dairy farm and I know the work involved in that. I ran away to join the Navy when I was seventeen to get away from the dairy farm. And I told her that if she gets even one dairy cow here, I'll write to Congress or do whatever it takes to somehow get back in the Navy."

Of course he said it with a hearty laugh. ★

**Gregory LeFever** is a contributing editor to *Early American Life*.

**Jacob sheep are a very old, rare breed of black and white sheep. The Harmans say their four-year-old ram, appropriately named Jacob, loves people.**



**Sadie, a miniature donkey, joins a Shetland ewe named Buttercup in a small corral.**