

unwittingly dislodged a crucial support beam from the two-story Dietz House, circa 1820, which came crashing down around him.

Some dangers, however, haven't lacked for humor. Hart and his friend, Harold Starnes, were able to load the Moore Utility Building, circa 1850, intact. "But when we got it to the village on the truck," Hart says, "it wouldn't pass between a set of trees. The tin roof was too wide. So I climbed up and started jerking out the nails, and when I jerked out the last nail, I was sitting on the last sheet of tin. I rode it off like a magic carpet. Luckily, I landed on an embankment, in a pile of leaves. Harold turned around and said, 'Doc, how'd you get down so fast?'"

Hart is also somewhat of a nail connoisseur. "Rosehead nails are handmade and help date the structures. The first American nail machine was patented in 1786, although handmade nails were used around here through the late 1800s. For the rosehead, one end of the forged shank, dropped into the hole of a bolster, was pounded down. The flattened result often resembles the petals of a rose," he says. "I take and keep everything. The only new things I buy are roofing nails. If a board is damaged, I go to the woodpile and find a similar, salvaged one. I take every board and every stone. I've taken the clothesline and even the outhouse."

Oh, pioneer

The Harts will have opened their village to the public for 20 years this October. Around 220 volunteer artisans demonstrate the period techniques of flax breaking and hackling, spinning, weaving, herb dyeing, open-hearth cooking, broom and shoe making, shingle riving, wheelwrighting, tinsmithing, and moonshining, among many others.

Each building, furnished according to its use, is in itself a museum, and Hart's wife, Becky, who has been instrumental in determining both the site of the buildings in the village as well as their interiors, has encouraged him to look now only for items that will round out the collections. Hart says he "likes finding things made for a specific purpose," like his finds of an 18th-century double-handled framed pit saw,

a basket-maker's bench, or a 30-inch-wide one-board table of curly poplar. At the moment, he's on the lookout for early surveying instruments.

Hart hopes that visitors enjoy and come to appreciate what he does: "how folks lived, how hard it was, what they endured to get us where we are today," he says. The Harts donate visitor proceeds to various cultural organizations in the area, including the Catawba County Historical Association, which sells tickets. Hart's passion for and preservation of North Carolina material history was recognized in 1983, when Governor Jim Hunt selected Hart as "Wildlife Conservationist of the Year." He also received Preservation North Carolina's Gertrude S. Carraway Award in 1997 and the National Daughters of the American Revolution Conservation Award the following year. A three-part documentary, "The 1840 Carolina Village," narrated by the late Shelby Foote, continues to run on PBS stations.

This past June, Hart moved and restored the 70th and, as he promised Becky (although he admits she's heard it before), the last of his log buildings. The Icenhour Granary, circa 1860, was donated from the Oxford Dam area and is now underpinned with stones and ready for visitors. You won't find a new thing on it except the nails in the roof. 🐾

Nathan Moehlmann lives in Hickory.

if you're going

Hart Square will be open on Saturday, October 22.

Tickets are available through the Catawba County Museum of History in Newton.

Catawba County Museum of History
30 North College Avenue
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