

# Antique Knitters Circular

*A Publication for Antique and Vintage Knitting Machine Hobbyists*

*Volume 1, Issue 2 March-April, 2002*

## Wildflower Farm



Ella and her baby  
Prince Charmin

Wildflower Farm is located in central Wisconsin. We raise registered Rambouillet sheep, colored Rambouillet, a few Corriedales, Merino crosses and Shetland crosses. They are raised for their fine wool and tasty meat. The emphasis is on fine wool and natural lamb. For the most part the sheep spend their time grazing on pasture. The animals are not fed hormones, antibiotics or unnatural feeds, just grass, hay and grains. We offer breeding stock, freezer lambs, hand spinning fleeces, roving, wool socks and hand made soap.

Visit my Web site at  
<http://my.voyager.net/~sheeplady/>

*Pat Lees, sheeplady*

Here is the sheeplady with some hungry bottle lambs



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## Antique Knitters Circular

Lamb Tuttle  
Family  
Knitting  
Machine

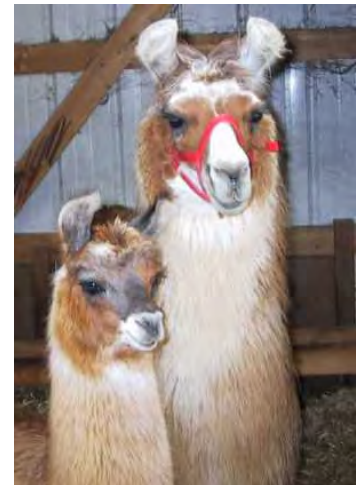


### Publisher

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### Cover Photo By Pat Lees

Ella and her baby Prince Charmin are beautiful Chilean heavy wooled llamas.



## The *Real* Fleecing of America: Part One

It is hard to say exactly when sheep were first raised for the purpose of harvesting the commodity called wool. Certainly, by the time of recorded history, wool had found its way into use. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, references to the ‘lamb’ and ‘tending the flock’ are found everywhere. To this day, sheep skin garments are recognized for comfort and warmth found in no other material. Modern fabrics woven from man made fibers challenge the qualities of wool for its resistance to heat and lightness, but wool continues to hold its place as one of the most recognized natural fibers known to man.

With the industrial age firmly in place, tools for shearing sheep, spinning wool, knitting and weaving, reduce the time required to make that transition from “fleece to feet”. Still, down on the farm, fleece production has seen little change over the years. “Shearing day” on farms across the country has the same buzz of the electric clipper as a century ago.

In this and following issues of Antique Knitters Circular, readers will surely form bonds of respect and admiration for these men and women who devote their lives to real down to earth labors of love.

Beginning with this issue, Antique Knitters Circular is pleased to introduce a family of sheep farmers that apply knowledge handed down for generations.

Pat Lees and her family raise sheep and llamas for the production of quality wool fleeces and yarns. Many sheep ranches produce large amounts of fleece to be sold to spinning mills where the process is carried on by large machines and the hands of strangers. Not so for the “sheeplady” from Rosholt, WI. From the breeding of fleece bearing animals to the carding of wool, Wildflower Farm manages their fleeces for variety and quality, with the intention of spinning yarns, and knitting home produced garments for sale and personal use.

Shearing day brings excitement and anticipation heightened by days of preparation. It is a day sandwiched between months of ‘taking care of the little things’, and more months of processing fleece into fabrics not unlike those found in the finest stores across the nation.

Antique Knitters Circular is grateful to the Lees family for their photographs and information that form the structure of these articles. Thank you Pat, and thanks to all the hired hands.

*the Publisher*

### Keeping the sheep clean is a year long problem



One of the most important things done throughout the year is keeping the wool clean. The longer woolled breeds, which have a more open fleece, wear coats to reduce the amount of hay and chaff that works its way into the wool. The rambouillet wool is so dense that the chaff doesn't work its way in.

Most of the wool is sold to hand spinners who don't want to pick a lot of hay and chaff out of fleece before spinning. Special feeders are used to help keep hay out of the wool.

The sheep are kept inside a day or so before shearing to be sure they are dry. You can always count on snowstorms or below zero weather the day before shearing!

When the shearer arrives, a large canvas mat is placed on the barn floor to keep the wool clean. Our shearer is Joe Huber from Oxford, Wisconsin. His dad and all of his brothers are shearers.



You can see how the fleece holds together and comes off all in one piece. It doesn't take Joe long to get the wool off. He did 30 sheep in about two and a half hours.



The boys that catch the sheep for us, Tim and Jay Cisewski, don't get too many breaks. The animals are close by where they have been drying off for a couple days. The sheep must be spotted near the shearing equipment, as it has limited range from the power unit on the wall.



The shearer must hold the animal in a comfortable position with his legs and one hand while shearing with the other hand. The sheep must remain calm for a period of about 5 minutes and is probably quite happy when it's over.



The sheared fleece is taken to a skirting table. The skirting table is made with slots which allow debris to fall to the floor. First, the fleece is shaken vigorously to remove any second cuts. Second cuts are short pieces of wool produced when the shearer goes over an area a second time.



The fine-wooled rambouillet will only grow about 2 to 3 inches of wool per year, but since the wool is so fine and dense, a fleece can weight up to 20 pounds from a large ram! Some of the other breeds can grow 4 to 6 inches of wool, but the fleece is not as dense and may weigh about 10 or 12 pounds.



## **Sheep, Good for the Environment**

Often celebrated in biblical stories and more modern rhymes, the sheep is seldom appreciated for the full scope of benefits it brings mankind.

A provider of both food and clothing, the sheep has the natural ability to provide much more.

Lamb and wool are environmentally correct, natural products that suit the new environmental consciousness of America.

Sheep are the perfect tool for controlling weeds and brush, helping land managers avoid mechanical and chemical means of control. Effective and efficient, sheep offer a low-cost alternative that is entirely natural. In fact, they work so well that corporate and government land managers have adopted or hired their own flocks to help in reforested areas and watersheds, have found sheep effective in reclaiming areas infested with noxious weeds, and used flocks to graze areas like ski slopes and under power lines where other means are ineffective. In California, sheep have even been used to graze fire-breaks.

Not the newest or flashiest of weed whackers, sheep may still be the best thing going.

Society has often embraced the throw-away mentality, using and abusing our non-renewable resources. Synthetic materials do just that, but wool offers consumers quality clothing without the environmental cost. Producing 8-10 pounds of beautiful wool a year, sheep provide the environmental benefits of grazing weeds and brush while growing their annual "crop" of wool that becomes your beautiful wool dress, suit or coat. Plus, wool can be used for environmentally friendly tasks like cleaning up oil spills or insulating houses, jobs that usually fall to synthetic materials that are resource-intensive to produce and hard to safely dispose. Wool is a great alternative.

Lamb is produced from natural renewable resources like grass, along with weeds and brush that would otherwise grow uncontrolled to create fire danger. Sheep are unique grazers, preferring weeds and providing a service in clearing them from fields and forests to improve plant and wildlife habitat. And all while creating a nutritious meat product essential to daily nutritional balance.

That's the long and short of it. Sheep provide a tool to help the environment. Sheep -- they are good for the environment.

**Prepared by the American Sheep Industry Association, Inc.**  
*American Sheep... good for you, good for the environment!*

There are many different types of wool from the finest Merino to the coarse Karakuls. Each sheep breed has its own unique properties and uses. Wool has a number of qualities you may not be aware of. The natural colors are cream, gray and charcoal.



Pat explains, "After shearing, the wool is washed here at the farm. I use plain old laundry detergent. It is then sent to Blackberry Ridge, a nearby woolen mill where it is spun into yarn. "Yes, I am a spinner, but there just aren't enough hours in the day to do it all."

The three socks on this page show natural wool colors and give a preview of what is coming in future issues. Carding, spinning and knitting will all be spotlighted before we leave Wildflower Farm and the sheeplady of Rosholt, Wisconsin.

Thanks to Pat Lees and her Shearing Day crew, we have an appreciation for the 'Real' fleecing of America.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service, there were approximately 66,800 sheep producers in America On Jan. 29, 2000, raising approximately 7 million head of sheep and lambs combined.

The sheep on Wildflower Farm are shorn once a year in the early spring. One advantage of shearing in the early spring is that the sheared sheep tend to find warmer places to birth new lambs. Baby lambs have suffered frost-bite on ears and feet when born in very cold weather.

*The publisher's observation:* Baby lambs go to work as soon as they are born. This youngster has a social security number on its ear and is expected to grow ten pounds of wool by this time next year.



*Another publisher remark:*

The picture left and to the right support the old adage, "There's always a black sheep in the family!"



For those who need a challenge and something to conceal a St. Patrick's Day beverage, try this advanced level project on your sock machine. Article and photo submitted by Roxana Baechle. Roxana 'cranks out' a variety of clever items on her machines.

## Leprechaun

This is a bottle cover/decoration for St. Patrick's Day fun. It will take any kind of green yarn and you will need to do a little sewing to attach arms, legs and hat. Your machine does not need to do ribbing.

Remove all except 12 needles in front. Use a set up rag or bonnet to get work going on scrap yarn working back and forth on those 12 needles. Use the heel tension spring when working back and forth. Stop with the yarn carrier on the left side of the machine.

Starting with Arms & Legs:

Remove tension spring for first row; put tension spring back on and knit back to left side. Using a pick or crochet hook, pull up the bar between each stitch and pull it up over the closest needle immediately to the right of the bar. (In essence, you are re-hanging a hem and creating a selvedge edge.) If this is too advanced for you, just knit these two rows and later go back and run the tail of your yarn through the first round. I just find it easier to take care of it right on the machine--much faster. Continue for another 20 rows. (You might want to do more than that if using a larger bottle.) At each end of the row, take the end stitch and move it over to the next needle so you are decreasing by two stitches on each row. Either pull the end needles up out of work or remove them from the machine. (I find it easier to remove them.) When you have 2 needles left, run the tail of the yarn through those



two and remove from machine. Leave a tail of 8" to sew the arms to the body. They will curl inward naturally, so you will not need to sew them. The pointed end is the "hand" and one will be sewn to the hat and one to the body. Replace needles and make another one the same length.

Repeat this process twice more, making the pieces 24 rows instead of 20. Leave a long tail for sewing the leg closed. To form the feet, sew the edges together from the pointed end and pull tightly to make the toes curl. Make a knot, then continue sewing up the leg. You will be sewing on the front side of the leg. Pull inward tightly a second time if you want to form a heel of sorts before you go up the front of the leg. Sew the leg in regular tension so it doesn't pucker.

*(Continued on page 10)*



Photography by Barry Travis from Arlington, Virginia. Thanks to Barry Travis for submitting these great pictures of his custom painted Fricke AutoKnitter and socks with contrasting heels and toes.

*The following article was extracted from the Clearfield Progress Newspapers dated October 20, 27 and November 3, 1978. The Editor Emeritus of the Progress was the late George A. Scott.*

## **The Gearhart Knitting Machine Co.**

(Second of Several Columns)

Four years ago, Mrs. Hampton U. Huff of Athens, Pa., a native of Olanta, reported seeing a Gearhart knitting machine in a western museum at Dillinger, Montana. Even more unique was the experience of Mr. and Mrs. Tim Ryan of 210 Johns Drive, Clearfield, during a vacation trip to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this past summer. "We were introduced to a family who are proud owners of a Gearhart Knitting Machine, manufactured in Clearfield by the Clearfield Knitting Machine Co. (a successor to the Gearhart company), They wrote to The Progress, "In ,the early '50s the Leo Trabert family purchased this knitting machine, along with a knitting manual of instruction and Sales, first edition, in a second-hand store in Milwaukee for \$5. The copyright date of the manual is 1927. The Traberts continued to purchase parts from the Clearfield company until about 1960. The knitting machine is in working condition and continues to be used by the Trabert family for making socks and the like.

The Gearhart Knitting Machine was the invention of Joseph Emery Gearhart, whose roots went back to the early days of this country. His great grandfather, John Gearhart emigrated from Germany in the 1700s, served as a soldier in the Revolutionary War and then settled at Centre County. His grandfather, John, served in the War of 1812 and moved to Clearfield County in 1820. John S. Gearhart, father of Joseph, was born on his father's farm near Phillipsburg and spent most of his life as a farmer in Boggs Township, Clearfield County, two miles west of West Decatur, (then known as Blue Ball).

Joseph Emery Gearhart, born April 22, 1849, grew to manhood on the family farm and was educated in the country schools of that era. His first employment after leaving the farm was with the lumber firm of Hoover,

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Hughes & Co. of Bellefonte, which had operations near Philipsburg. Roland D. Swoope, Jr. reports in his History of Clearfield County (1912) that during Mr. Gearhart's nine years with the lumber company he helped ship most of the lumber that was used in buildings for the Centennial Exposition of 1876 at Philadelphia.

Although he attributed much of his success to the instructions of his father-in-law, John Middleton, who was an expert machinist and gunsmith, Mr. Gearhart is reported by Swoope to have been interested in mechanics from youth. He began working on a knitting machine, received a patent on it and in 1889 opened a small shop at West Decatur for its manufacture.

**(To Be Continued)**

## Washington Sock Machine Knit-In

Fancy Image Yarn, Shelton, WA

On February 23, 2002, Pat Fly from Tenino, WA, hosted a knit-in at Myra's Fancy Image Yarn shop. Only four people brought knitting machines, but many interested visitors were there to watch the event. The knit-in was a lot of fun.

Deb Browne from Silverdale came with her refurbished machine, an Auto Knitter that she recently purchased. Louisa Murphy, Port Angeles, bought a Legare 400 sock machine and learned to make a sock. Del Oaks from The Dalles, OR, arrived with her Green Auto Knitter. Pat said, "Every time I see that machine I get 'green' with envy!"

Del is shown here working on her Auto Knitter which she was so fortunate to purchase for \$10.00.



Pat commented, "It was pretty hectic in the morning as many visitors were asking questions about the machines. Later on, we were able to chat and enjoy talking csm's between ourselves. Myra ordered pizza and we all went upstairs to eat and look around her shop."

Pat went on to say, "The shop has some really beautiful yarns! One of the regulars was displaying

the intarsia sweater and matching hat she made from angora/wool and cotton yarn. I'm always amazed at how creative knitters are! It was gorgeous!"

## Future Knit-Ins

Pat wants to continue the knit-ins or classes once a month on Fridays. For information about the Washington Sock Machine Knit-In, contact:

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angoravalley@thurston.com  
Phone/Fax 360-264-4727

*Thanks to Pat Fly for sharing this report about her knit-in on February 23.*

## CSMSA 2001

Meeting new friends at the CSMSA Conferences is ample reason for attending. At this banquet table were, left to right, Barry Travis, Dick and Marion Mowrer, Lea and Fred Hauck and Gigi Gregory.



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#### Drawstring for neck:

Put 3 needles in the front of the machine. Do NOT use scrap yarn. Thread the carrier with it placed to the left of the needles and take the tail of yarn to start your I-cord. Circle the right needle clockwise, the left needle counter clockwise, and the center needle clockwise. Pulling down on the end of the yarn, knit to the right or forward. Continue going forward for 80 rows. Cut yarn and run the tail through the 3 stitches. Bury the end. (Leave the other tail on until you get the cord threaded through the neckline of the shirt, then bury that end and terminate the yarn.)

#### Hat:

Use 30 needles and begin with scrap yarn as before, working back and forth. Stop on the left side of the machine and attach your good yarn. (Leave a 3-4" tail to work in after you are finished.) With tension spring on, knit 60 rows; re-hang the hem; knit 20 rows. Move every other stitch over to the next needle and remove the blank needle. Knit one row. Cut yarn leaving a 12" tail. Run tail through the last row of stitches and pull tight. Continue sewing down the seam of the hat and brim. Bury the end of the yarn and terminate. Sew one of the "hands" to the brim; bury and terminate yarn.

#### Body:

Replace all needles in cylinder and set up in scrap yarn. You may work with or without tension spring since you will only go forward now. Knit 12 rows. Move every other stitch over to next needle to form picot edge. Knit 12 rounds. Re-hang hem. Knit 35 rounds (more if using a large bottle). Move one stitch over to next needle, leave two needles as is, then move the next one over. Continue once around cylinder. (These are the drawstring holes for the neckline.) Knit 10 rounds. If you can crochet, leave a real long tail. If not, leave at least 12". Knit off on scrap yarn for about 10 rows, then cut yarn and knit it off the machine. You can either run the tail through the end stitches or crochet an edge. This is not going to show, as the neckline will roll, so don't worry about being fancy.

#### Finishing:

Take the I-cord and thread the tail through a blunt needle. Run it through the holes you created. Bury and terminate the end of the yarn. Draw it up snug enough to form a neck hole. Position the arm which has the hat attached to it and sew into place. Position the other arm in a similar position on the opposite side and sew into place. Sew the hand of that arm to the body at about the waistline. Sew the legs at the line where you re-hung the hem. Bury the ends.

Now he can keep his little hat over the top of your bottle between nips or let it hang at his side. The two of you enjoy your St. Patrick's Day celebration in whatever way suits your fancy. Since the bottle is covered, no one will know what's inside!