

Elf Guards Farm Workshop

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SEVEN VALLEYS (York Co.)

— An elf has been spotted on a York County farm.

But not to worry. Actually, the elf is a little statue that guards the picket fence enclosing a charming, small garden, entrance to The Elfin Studio.

Inside The Elfin Studio, located on a farm at Seven Valleys R2, Elizabeth Sowers is busy in her version of an elf workshop, designing and sewing handcrafted doll clothing.

"I love it," she says, with the ready smile of a cheerful elf whose work makes children happy.

Specialty item of the Elfin Stu-

dio is Elizabeth's hand-sewn miniature garments. She displays them surrounded by beautiful dolls and accessories that are also available. Here, a doll can be not only outfitted with a new dress, but also shoes, hats, furniture, even clothes trunks and small, handcrafted wire hangers.

Elizabeth began sewing doll clothes as a Chester County teenager; for her sister about 10 years younger than herself, using sewing skills she first learned in school.

"I never played with dolls that much as a child," she says. "Crafts were what I really enjoyed, so I was more likely to be making things for dolls or my own paper-dolls with cardboard and outfits



"Dana," a Gotz doll, is typical of the size and style dolls for which Elizabeth Sowers creates her fashion designs. The dolls have soft bodies and firm head and limbs with moveable joints.



In the garden entrance to her Elfin Studio, Elizabeth Sowers displays two of her Madame Alexander dolls, Hans and Gretel Brinker. These dolls, from the classic children's story "Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates," are made in a factory in Harlem, New York City.

cut from catalogs."

Elizabeth and her husband Dan live in the remodeled and expanded summerhouse on the Sowers family's farm. Before locating her business to their home, she had a stand at the Farmers' Market in York for marketing her doll clothing and accessories.

Most of the clothing that Elizabeth designs and sews is for the dolls in the American Girls or Gotz collections. These 18-inch tall, realistic-faced dolls have soft bodies with firm, moveable limbs, large sparkling eyes and soft, silky hair. The American Girls Collection is based on a series of books about girls in various periods of American history, with a doll for each series.

"These are the most popular dolls since Barbie and Cabbage

Patch and they are only available through catalogs. They're a more traditional doll, which older girls like and they have a lot of accessories that are appropriate," Elizabeth explains.

Because they represent varying periods of American history, like Colonial and Victorian times, the dolls, their storybooks and their accessories are educational as well as fun for children to play with. Most of the costumes that Elizabeth sews are garments which would have been typical dress during the historical periods of time represented by the dolls.

"I can only make five or six outfits a week," says this detail-minded doll-clothing designer. "Most take at least eight hours; even on a simple dress, there is a lot of hand sewing."

Elizabeth's doll dresses include hand-sewn snaps for closing, rather than Velcro which she believes may snag the dolls' hair. Even overlapped seams are stitched down to lay flat against the garment at places where seams may be visible, like the inside of a ruffled sleeve edge.

"When I make doll clothes, I want them to hold together. They're made to be played with," Elizabeth emphasizes.

Hats are the finishing touch for many well-dressed dolls. Elizabeth searches craft shops and catalogs for doll hats, often difficult to find, then adds her own creative touches to match them to her handcrafted dresses.

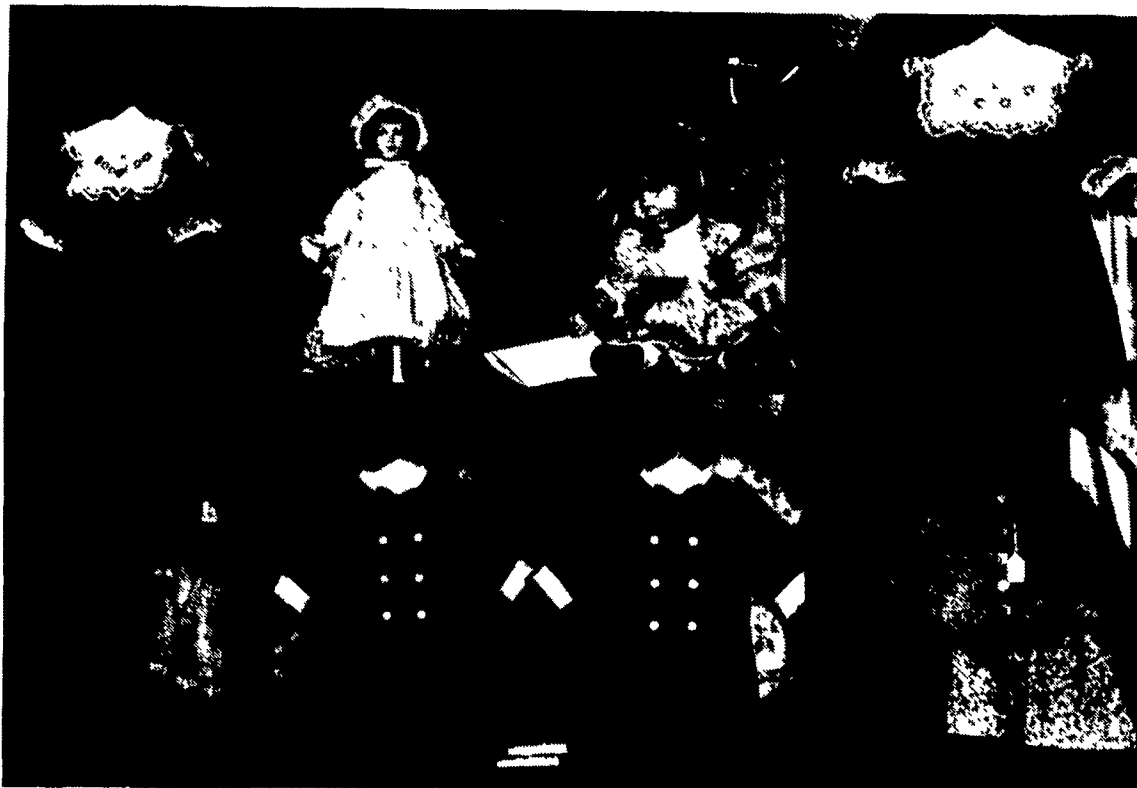
Christmas and Easter seasons are extra busy at The Elfin Studio, as parents and grandparents shop for gift dolls or special dresses. Most of the time, though, the customers are girls who have dolls and want certain outfits for them, often saving their own money to purchase a dress or accessories.

Several times a year, Elizabeth exhibits at regional doll shows, events which help her stay in touch with changing trends in dolls. Antique dolls are very popular, she explains, especially bisque and old German dolls. Occasionally, a customer will show her an old doll that was rescued from a trash can. Any doll less than 60 years old is still considered a "modern" one. An "old" one would probably date to the late 1800s or early 1900s.

Both older Barbie dolls and some of the newer specialty Barbies are also very much in demand among collectors. And, while most of her sewing is for the larger dolls, Elizabeth does offer a variety of handsewn Barbie garments, too.

Though she is surrounded every day by dolls, Elizabeth only keeps a few very special ones for her own collection, occasionally dressing them in a favorite costume she has designed. Most of the time, she is too busy cutting, sewing and hand-stitching details on garments for the dolls of other collectors.

"This is a lifetime thing with me," says this doll "elf." "You must love it."



Beautifully handcrafted doll clothing, attractive accessories and miniature furniture delight doll lovers — young and old alike — who visit The Elfin Studio.

Homestead Notes