



Robert J. Stewart / Special to The Courant

Dressed in Victorian-era clothing, Harold E. and Theodora A. Niver are ready to welcome guests into their Rocky Hill home.

Rocky Hill residents delight in legend of Sherlock Holmes

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ROCKY HILL — Not many people can combine hobbies with business, but Harold E. and Theodora A. Niver are not like ordinary people.

They spend their days surrounded by the music, instruments and theatrical props of the Victorian age. At night they retire to Baskerville Hall, a home that's decked with dolls in two-brimmed hats, Inverness coats and curl-stem pipes. The furnishings sit atop heavy Oriental rugs, and there is antique bric-a-brac everywhere.

The Nivers have created a 19th-century paradise for themselves and their favorite friend of fiction and legend, Sherlock Holmes.

"If Sherlock Holmes were to walk into the room he'd feel right at home," Harold Niver said. He'd find a scuttle for his cigars, a pair of boxing gloves, a bottle for his cocaine and photographs of himself in the persona of Basil Rathbone and other actors who played Holmes.

The Tudor-style house on the "tor," or hill, at 49 Woodhaven Road holds many of the Nivers' 4,000 pieces of Holmes memorabilia.

"It's very livable," Theodora Niver said. "It's not like a museum." They have hot and cold running water, electricity and a microwave oven.

"If we were that crazy we could do

"If Sherlock Holmes were to walk into the room he'd feel right at home."

Harold Niver
Sherlock Holmes buff

everything Sherlock Holmes," Harold Niver said. The bathroom is tagged John H. Watson.

When the Nivers greet visitors, they dress in Victorian-styled clothing. She might wear a blue calf-length frock with high-laced collar and cinched waist. He may be in a blue blazer with a bow tie striped with the colors of England, and a similar emblem on the pocket. They have two dogs named Dame Daphne Perrybingle and Abercrombie N. Fitch. Their basement is about to be transformed into an English pub, and one of their bedrooms is titled, 221B Baker Street.

Harold Nivers began his "whimsical" affair with the Holmes legend about 20 years ago. Theodora has her own fascination for Dracula and the Disney characters. She was turned on to Holmes by her husband. Holmes, Disney, Dracula and the Nivers have been together about 13 years.

They can't escape the Holmesian

lore even at work. The Nivers own a piano store called Sherlock's Music at 976 Silas Deane Highway in Wethersfield. Theodora Niver is an organist for the Incarnation Rectory in Wethersfield, and Harold Niver said his family has been in the piano business for generations.

The antique and modern pianos stand near show props and posters from plays about Holmes. The framed biography of Holmes prompted a customer to ask Harold Niver, "Is Sherlock Holmes a real person?"

Harold Niver said he gets the props from theaters by requesting that "Instead of throwing things away, throw them my way."

Niver has tons of books on Holmes, including the 60 stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This includes the 127-page volume "The Five Orange Pips." The book is about the size of a thumbnail.

The Nivers cap their Holmesian experience with membership in the group called Men on the Tor. This is a loose membership of about 40 Holmes admirers, with the name taken from a famous scene in Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles." The scene shows a silhouette of a man standing on a rocky hill.

"Since we live on a hill in Rocky Hill, it's guilt by association," he said.