



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Frank Duff has collected hundreds of pieces of American stained glass at his home outside of Helix.

THE STAINED GLASS STABLE



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Frank Duff holds up a piece he believes was created by famous stained glass window maker John La Farge. La Farge was famous for the windows he created in the 1900s.

Helix couple buys, sells intricately designed pieces from barn-turned-studio

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Frank and Nancy Rees Duff probably have more stained glass than any house of worship in Umatilla County.

At the Duffs' barn-turned-studio north of Helix, stained glass hangs on walls and ceilings in all shapes and sizes.

There's no unifying theme to the collection, save Frank's discerning eye, and many of these pieces will eventually ship to other collectors across the U.S.

As much as it is a labor of love, the contents of the barn are officially part of a business — Antique American Stained Glass Windows.

In his words, Frank began collecting stained glass when he worked under a "hippie" to save stained glass that was being thrown out as a part of a wave of urban renewal in Minneapolis in the 1970s.

Living in Michigan at the time, Frank spent the ensuing decades building contacts that would bring him stained glass pieces that he would turn around and sell.

Frank grew up in Michigan but his family has Eastern Oregon roots, his father having grown up on a farm off of Highway 11 near the Helix turnoff.

It was at a 2001 Duff family reunion in the area where he met Nancy, a retired art teacher at Weston-McEwen High School.

They hit it off and would

marry a year later, at which time Frank had to make a decision — whether to stay in Flint, Michigan, or move to Nancy's 1,000-acre farm.

Flint's "dire straits" made it an easy choice, Frank said.

The Duffs are now well established on their east county land, the modern nature of the internet marketplace allowing them to make a living selling antique items.

"It's a business you can do out here in the sticks," Nancy said.

Frank said he doesn't buy glass that needs to be restored, finding it too difficult to find the right glass or frames to restore it properly.

When he does make a sale, Frank and Nancy often crisscross the country to hand deliver it so that the piece doesn't get damaged.

"I buy things I like with the conceited idea that other people will like it too."

— **Frank Duff,**
stained glass collector

Frank shies away from buying stained glass based on historical reputation given that many pieces lack documentation that verifies whether it was crafted by industry titans like La Farge or Tiffany, making it difficult to establish value if someone contests the legitimacy.

"You get into the top end of the market, provenance is everything," he said.

Instead, Frank selects stained glass based on whether it appeals to him on



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Light shines through a stained glass window depicting wisteria vines.

a personal level.

"I buy things I like with the conceited idea that other people will like it too," he said.

Although he doesn't usually acquire religious stained glass because of the difficulties, he recently obtained a window depicting Jesus partly because of the way the textures and colors varied when viewed from each side.

While his interest in stained glass predates Nancy, Frank said his wife brings important qualities to their business, like the ability to articulate the artistic merits of a certain piece or provide the occasional reminder about

why Antique American might be going through a dry sales period.

Frank calls it a valuable "cross-fertilization."

During a recent open house, Nancy sold handmade glass jewelry and dishware alongside the antique glass, bringing her own original pieces to the mix.

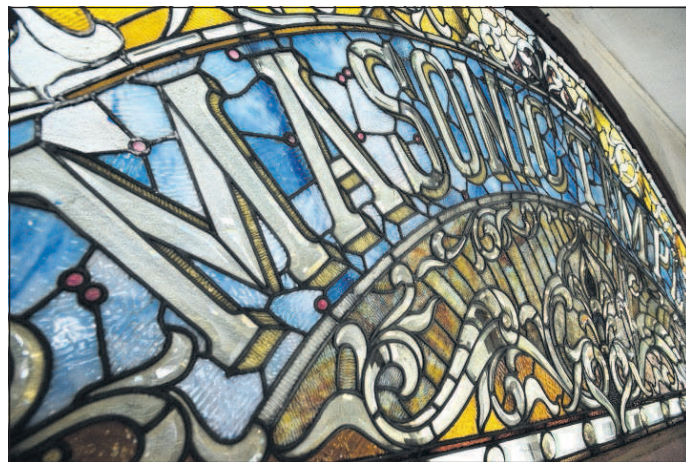
All of these treasures are tucked away in a red barn off a dirt road, framed by wheat fields so idyllic, it could be the subject of a stained glass window.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Stained glass comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes including this curved dome piece.



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Duff bought this stained glass window from a Masonic Lodge in Saginaw, Mich.