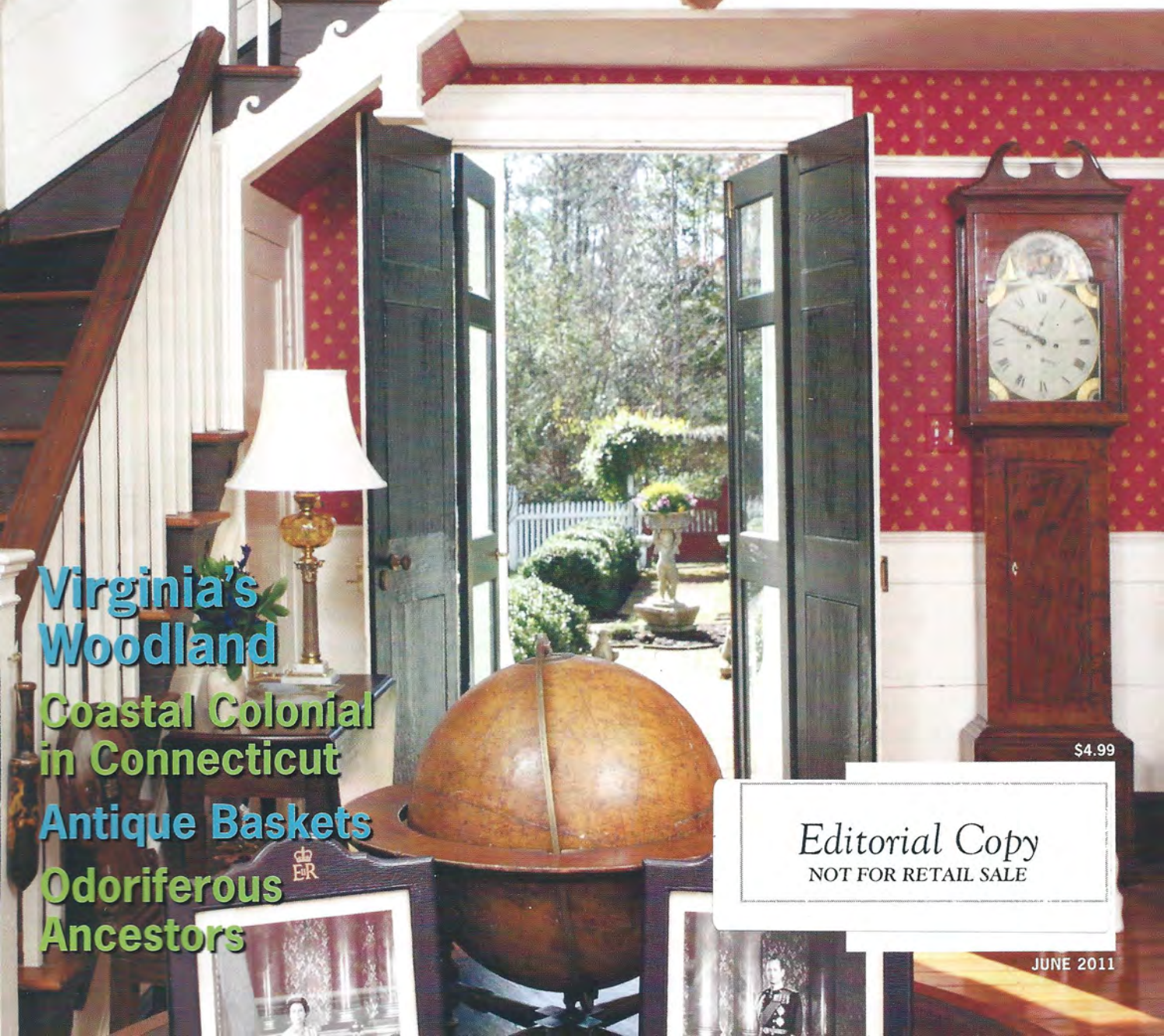


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LISA NELTHROPP

In 2001, Lisa Nelthropp of Wolfeboro Falls, New Hampshire, was running a cake-decorating business. As she tells it:

“One day I was in my shop and I put my hands down on the stainless steel table and said, ‘I’m going to paint in the style of Rufus Porter.’ It was almost like somebody said it for me. I had no idea how I was going to do it, when I was going to do it, or why I was going to do it. I just knew I was going to do it.”

The incident is especially interesting because Nelthropp knew next to nothing about Porter. “I think I may have seen something about him in a book somewhere,” she guessed.

With no art training to draw

upon, she painted her first mural in her home. A friend showed it to another woman, and Nelthropp gained her first client. The more people saw her murals, the more clients she acquired, and soon her work was featured in *Yankee* magazine among other media. Since then she's been traveling up and down the East Coast painting murals in homes and businesses.

Along the way, Nelthropp, who has exhibited natural artistic talent since childhood, picked up the training she'd been missing. "To be a decorative painter in early America, you had to know a hundred different surfaces before you could even apprentice with someone," she said. Enrolling at the Massachusetts Institute of Surface Design for an array of classes, she has now gained certification in seventy-five different finishes.

Period artists who fascinated her also became focuses of her studies, particularly key examples of the

Hudson River School of American painting, such as Thomas Chambers (1808-69) and Thomas Cole (1801-48). "They've actually formed the basis of my own style," she noted.

The cost of her murals can range from about \$500 to \$14,000, depending on the project's specifications.

Nelthropp is an intuitive artist. She often relies on an inner sense to guide many of her style and content decisions, and her clients have responded positively. "I'm gratified to have so many clients who have called me back again and again for more murals." ★

Gregory LeFever is a contributing editor to *Early American Life*.

Photographs of antique murals courtesy of Linda Carter Lefko, co-author of the recently published book about murals of the Rufus Porter landscape school, *Folk Art Murals of the Rufus Porter School: New England Landscapes 1825-1845* (Schiffer Ltd., 2011). For information, visit www.lclefko.com.

The tintypes of Anna R. Putnam and John Putnam likely were taken in 1858 to commemorate their 60th wedding anniversary. Anna was approximately 79 years old, John 80. The tintypes came wrapped in an envelope that identified the sitters in shaky handwriting along with the words "Mother's grandparents." The framed tintypes rest upon an heirloom silk, velvet, and satin crazy quilt made later.