



Frederick's Legacy
The Art of Helen L. Smith

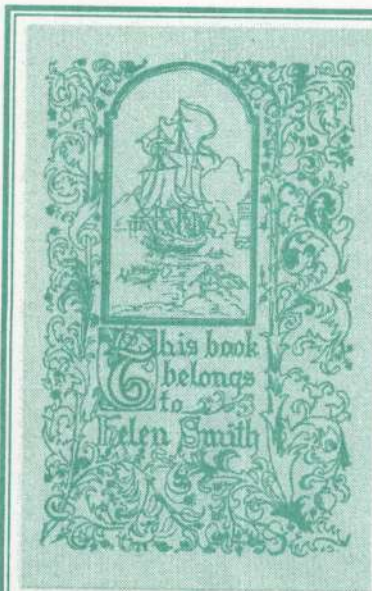


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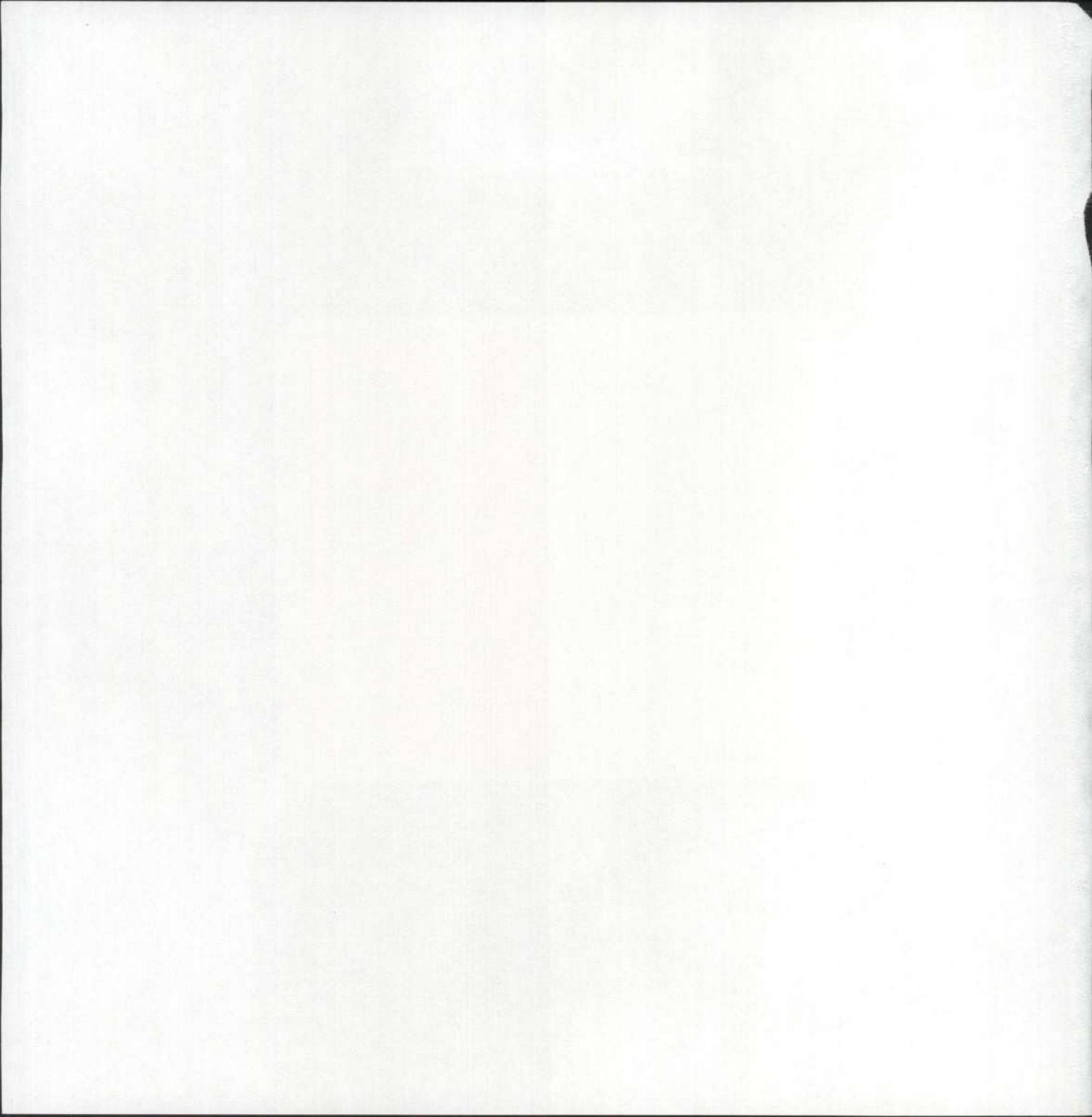
**“I worked awfully hard.
Nothing seemed too much to
tackle. I would just bust a
button and do it!”**

True to her word, Frederick artist Helen L. Smith constantly expanded her artistic skills. Although her formal studies were in traditional pen and ink, oil, and watercolor, she also embellished clock faces, hand painted china, and executed detailed designs on wood and metal. She created thousands of silhouettes of Frederick children, produced more than 10,000 coats of arms, and provided illustrations for newspapers, posters, and books. For most of this century she documented the people and the landscape of Frederick County. She became a local legend, endearing herself to the Frederick community. She died in 1997 at the age of 103.

Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith looks at the woman behind the artist and features more than 80 color illustrations.



This book
was donated to the
Community Foundation
of Frederick County
courtesy of
the Helen L. Smith
Book Project.



Frederick's Legacy

The Art of Helen L. Smith







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This book is dedicated
to the legacy of
Helen L. Smith, to her family
and friends, and to those
inspired by her work
and her life.

Frederick's Legacy

The Art of Helen L. Smith





Cover: Detail from the Helen L. Smith poster
done in honor of Smith's 100th birthday ✓
January 21, 1994

Title Page: *Justice*

Helen L. Smith

oil on canvas, 1924

City Hall, Frederick, Maryland

Produced by the Helen L. Smith Book
and Studio Project Committee

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and Studio Project Committee

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First Edition

Whenever we visited Helen L. Smith we were inspired to follow her example and “go out and do it.” We learned how important it is to “never say no.” We were reminded, as we walked in her garden, that beauty is all around us. Simply put, we loved Helen L. Smith.

How else do you explain why a group of volunteers, whose only common denominator is affection for this amazing woman, has worked for more than three years to produce *Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith*.

The Helen L. Smith Book and Studio Project Committee began its efforts to publish an illustrated manuscript on the life and work of Helen L. Smith shortly after her 100th birthday celebration in 1994. We asked “Miss Helen,” as we all called her, if she would permit us to catalog and photograph her work with the intent of publishing a book. “Oh, my goodness,” she laughed, “who would ever want to read a book about me?” We hope that you will say, as we did, “Oh, I would, Miss Helen!”

We believe this book will give you a better understanding of the scope and diversity of her work and allow you to discover the woman behind the artist.

As Frederick County celebrates the 250th anniversary of its founding, we recognize Helen L. Smith's legacy by the publication of this book.

Helen L. Smith, Frederick's well-known and beloved artist who documented the history of Frederick County through her art, painted from the time she was a child until her death in 1997 at the age of 103.

As artist, teacher, mentor, businesswoman, and civic leader, she left an inspiring legacy for future generations.

A Frederick County native, Helen Leona Smith was born at Bellview, Ballenger Creek Pike, on January 21, 1894, the daughter of Howard Luther and Nellie Leona Thomas Smith. She was the oldest of seven children. At age four she moved with her family to a nearby farm, Locust Plains. She attended grade school at White Oak School, a one-room schoolhouse not far from her home.



“As a little girl, I would draw animals and plants on a small slate which I kept wrapped in wool to keep it from breaking,” she recalled. Twelve-year-old Helen entered a drawing contest sponsored by *Farm Journal*

magazine and was awarded a set of watercolors, which she taught herself to use.

After graduating from Girl's High School on East Church Street in Frederick in 1912, she wanted to go to art school, but her father thought art school a

waste of money. However, Smith's uncle, John Travers Thomas, felt her talent should be encouraged. He discovered a little-known program offering an art scholarship to the Maryland Institute of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, (now known as the Maryland Institute, College of Art) to one student from each county in Maryland. Smith won the scholarship

and lived with another uncle, Dudrow Thomas, and his family while attending the institute. She later studied art briefly at Columbia University and the University of Rhode Island.

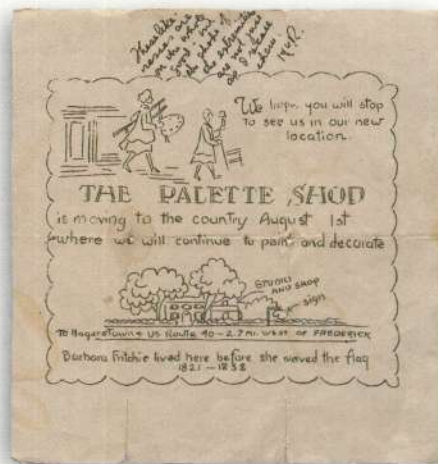
Following her graduation from the Maryland Institute in 1916, she returned to Frederick where she taught art at Hood College, a private college for women, from September 1916 to June 1925. She served four years as head of Hood's art department. While teaching, Smith accepted commissions for various jobs, from designing magazine covers to painting murals. She was eager to see if she could earn a living as an artist. After eight years of teaching, she decided to move on.

On September 15, 1925, Smith and Marion Spinning, a Hood graduate and former art instructor at the

college, opened an art and gift shop called the Palette Shop at 311 North Market Street. Philip Wertheimer, the building's owner, was reluctant to rent the shop to a woman, but his fears proved groundless; Smith

became one of the area's first successful female entrepreneurs.

"I could not afford much, and it was an old building with no plumbing," she said. "I had a kiln and a big fireplace that kept me warm. People would stop in; they liked seeing things created right there."



She accepted commissions for paintings, embellished clock faces, painted flowers or local scenes on china, and executed detailed designs on metal trays or almost any paintable surface. As Frederick had no commercial artist at the time, she also did illustrations for newspapers, posters, and books, including *Fighting*

for *Time* by Glenn H. Worthington and *Garden Pools, Water-Lilies, and Goldfish* by G. L. Thomas, Jr.

During this period, Smith began to paint small pins and matching earrings.

They became so popular, particularly with Hood College students, that she and her assistant had difficulty meeting the demand. She liked to say that “pin money” enabled her to travel to Europe.

An independent woman who relished travel, she sailed on the T. S. S. Cameronia for a two-month tour of Europe in 1928.

In 1930 she traveled to the Grand Canyon, the Canadian Rockies, and California, where she embarked for a 28-day cruise through the Panama Canal. Her detailed diaries, sketches,

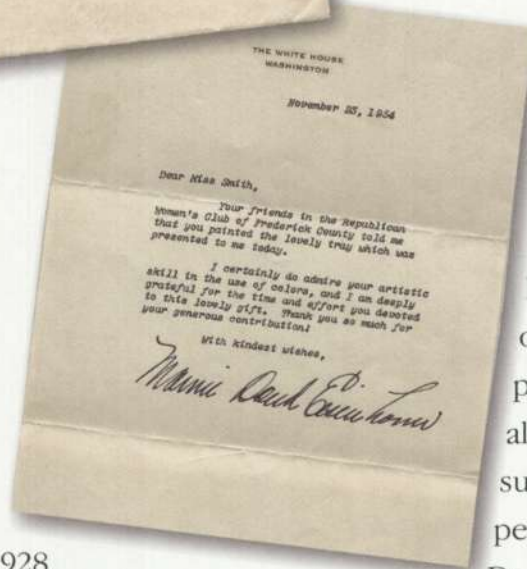
and meticulously labeled photographs record a bygone era.

In 1935 she moved her shop to 237 North Market Street.

“This was a big improvement as it had a restroom, but still no heat. I got a heater at Potomac Edison, and with the kiln that helped to make things cozy,” she said.

Living in an apartment over the shop, she often worked well into the night to keep up with orders. Her perseverance allowed her to survive the worst perils of the Depression, yet she sometimes made barely enough to pay for food.

“I worked awfully hard. I was determined. Nothing seemed too



much to tackle. I would just do it. I would just bust a button and do it," she recalled.

In 1940, Smith decided she needed a change. She bought an old, white clapboard house on the Old National Pike in Old Braddock, west of Frederick, which at one time had been owned by Barbara Fritchie and her husband, John. Smith was delighted to learn that the property, called "Neighbor's Agreement" on the deed, had also been

owned by her great-grandfather, George Smith. She painstakingly renovated the house and converted the adjacent summer kitchen into a studio. This location, some distance from town, required a car for transportation. Smith handled this in her usual forthright way, buying a car and promptly learning to drive. She reopened the Palette Shop at the



Braddock location on August 1, 1940, and painted there until just before her death in 1997.

Despite dire predictions no one would find her new location, she continued to attract commissions from Maryland, Virginia, New York, and as far away as Alabama. Friends and family rewarded her talent with orders, as did several of Washington's embassy officials. In "The Helen Smith Collection: Art and Papers," an archival

collection owned by Hood College, is a letter from First Lady Mamie Eisenhower recognizing Smith's artistry and a photograph documenting then Vice-President Richard Nixon's acceptance of one of her unique lampshades.

Earlier, in 1939, Smith received a commission for a watercolor, *Spring at Monterey*, of the childhood home

of the future Duchess of Windsor. Given by a friend as a wedding gift to the Duke and Duchess, the painting was sold at auction by Sotherby's in February 1998.

Smith was also known for her silhouettes.

One of her most famous subjects was U.S. Senator Charles MacMathias, Jr., who grew up on Court Square in

Frederick. She hand-painted and framed thousands of wedding invitations that friends or relatives brought to her for a "one of a kind" personalization, and which were then given to the couple as a wedding gift. She had an extensive collection of bookplates and was an authority on heraldry, with coats of arms a specialty. "I stopped counting at 10,000," she said.



Spring at Monterey

Her art has been exhibited locally at Hood College, Mount Saint Mary's College, Frederick City Hall, the Weinberg Center for the Arts, The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center in Frederick, the Historical Society of

Frederick County, and the Washington County Museum of Fine Art in Hagerstown, Maryland. It can be found in government offices, churches, libraries, and

homes throughout Frederick County and beyond. Her media included paint, pencil, ink, and clay. She taught herself églomisé (reverse painting on glass), and excelled at tole work, painting on parchment, and cutting silhouettes. She also worked with textiles and did numerous restorations.

Smith's most famous work, *Justice*, is permanently displayed in Frederick City Hall. In 1924, while teaching at Hood, Smith was commissioned by the Daughters of the American Revolution to execute a large oil painting to hang in the alcove behind the judge's bench in the main courtroom of the Frederick County Courthouse. During the 1953 courtroom remodeling, the painting was taken down. Alteration of the courtroom left insufficient space to re-hang the 10 x 8-foot painting in the spot it had occupied for almost thirty years. It was rolled up, stored in the attic, and forgotten.

When the building was acquired by the city in 1985, Smith's painting of *Justice* was found. "It was a mess of scrapes and blemishes, and boy, was it dirty! Mayor [Ronald] Young asked me if I knew anyone who could restore it. I thought, well darn, if it's the last thing I do, I'm going to do it myself!" Therefore, after 61 years, at

the age of 91, she restored her own painting, attracting attention from both local and national media.

Smith was known for her paintings of local landscapes and landmarks, especially the Clustered Spires, Schifferstadt, Rose Hill Manor, the swinging bridge at Carroll Creek, Catoctin Furnace and Jug Bridge. Smith's painting of Frederick's famous clustered church spires is also found on the city's official seal.

Not only an artist and entrepreneur, Smith was involved in her community. She joined the Frederick Art Club in 1916 and was an active member until her death 81 years later.

Her love of flowers and birds inspired her to join the Tasker's Chance Garden Club, where she gave practical and up-to-date horticultural reports for many years. She became an accredited flower show judge and served on the board of District 5, Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland. Gardening was her special joy, and

she was known for the hundreds of varieties of flowers and wildflowers that grew in her gardens. Her gardens also provided subjects for many of her paintings as well as relief from her exacting art.

In 1930, she helped establish the Zonta Club of Frederick, a group of professional women interested in improving the quality of the community. Serving as the club's president in 1935, one of the projects she promoted was the annual Art in the Park show, which she judged for some 50 years. Her support of Zonta extended to giving the local club the right to print and sell her famous *Clustered Spires of Frederick* and *Winchester Hall*.

In addition, two limited-edition lithographs, *Utica Covered Bridge* and *Catoctin Furnace*, are included in a series featuring local scenes by local artists and printed by the Great Southern Printing and Manufacturing Co. of Frederick.

She maintained membership and interest in the Historical Society of Frederick County and was an early supporter of The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center.

Both Hood College and Mount Saint Mary's College presented Smith honorary degrees in 1989. In 1996 the Maryland Institute, College of Art, awarded her an honorary bachelor of fine arts degree. The Frederick Woman's Civic Club submitted several of her works of art in 1992 to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, where they were accepted for the museum's Archives on Women Artists Library and Research Center.

On January 21, 1994, Smith's 100th birthday, more than 400 friends and family joined her at a gala luncheon sponsored by Hood College, the Community Foundation of Frederick County, The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center, the Frederick Art Club, Tasker's Chance Garden Club, and the Zonta Club. An announcement was made of the Helen L. Smith Endowed Scholarship Fund for Children and

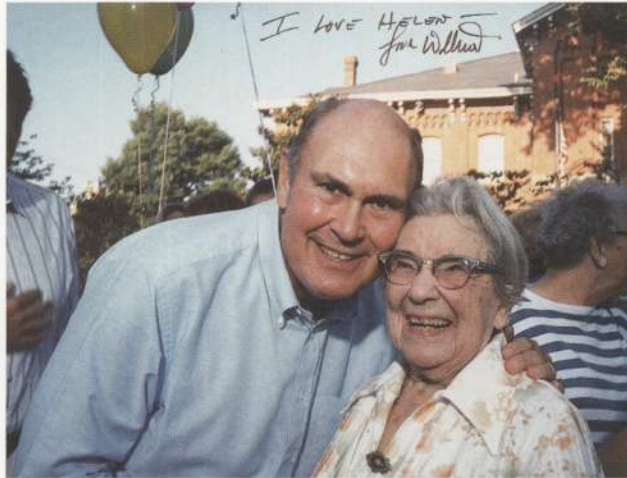
the Arts, established through the Community Foundation to provide lessons for aspiring young artists. Retrospective exhibitions of Smith's work were shared with the public at The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center, the Historical Society of Frederick County, Frederick City Hall, and Hood College. A commemorative color poster was published to benefit the endowed fund.

In 1995 she was named to the Frederick County Women's History Trail and honored for "blazing the trail" for the county's female entrepreneurs and professional artists. And at the age of 101, she delighted in being interviewed by NBC's *Today Show* host and weatherman, Willard Scott.

That same year Smith served as Grand Marshall for the parade

celebrating the city's 250th anniversary. "When Mayor [James] Grimes asked me, I wondered what I would have to do. He said, 'Just sit in a car and wave.' I said, 'I can do that.'"

Smith was widely known for her



Helen L. Smith with NBC's "Today Show" host Willard Scott.

spirited personality and keen memory. She lived alone, tended her flower gardens, and painted every day until shortly before her death.

Considered by many the dean of Frederick County artists, she contributed much to the art community through her teaching and her affiliation with other artists and by inspiring an appreciation of beauty through her art.

When she died in 1997 at the age of 103, she left a rich legacy that will be treasured for years to come.

CHILD Paper was very scarce and as a child Helen Leona Smith drew on a slate that she wrapped in a red woolen cloth to keep the edges from chipping.

It opened like a book, and when she started school at age six, she drew a picture on the front. All the children in her class wanted her to draw a picture on their slates, which she did.

“**O**ne day someone rang the school bell so hard that it remained upside-down. The bell was on the top of the school and could only be reached by ladder and a little nerve. I went over to



the boys and asked, ‘Why don’t one of you boys fix the bell?’ They answered, ‘Why don’t you?’ I thought, well, why not. It wasn’t too hard going up but coming down was a different matter. I had never climbed a ladder to a roof before. I was scared out of my skin but I did it!

“**W**alk? Oh, my land, yes...whoever heard of school buses? And if the snow was too deep, you went across the fields, where they were windswept. Then [after completing grade school] we went into Frederick to the high school...it was the building

up on East Church Street, opposite the funeral home; that was the Girl’s High School. Our class had 22 members.

“**F**rom Ballenger Creek, we

came in on Jefferson Pike and then down Patrick...I remember when Patrick Street was cobbles, and it wasn’t by any chance one way then! We would go up Bentz...it was a dirt street and there was no bridge over the creek. We forded that in the carriage. I remember hanging out the back seat, watching the carriage wheels cut through the water. Then we would go up Bentz to Church [Street]. The horses would be tied to a long iron rail behind the courthouse. And then you’d walk to church!



“I sketched before I could write.”

“You see, we didn’t have electricity [but] father had a Delco plant [generator] in the cellar. In the evening when we were studying, we had a great big Rayo lamp. It made a grand light. That always sat in the middle of the dining room table, and all of us kids would be around the table. Mother would be at one end, with her sewing; she made all our clothes... back then you didn’t go and buy stuff. And Father would be sitting at the other end, reading the paper out loud. ‘Lena (my mother’s name was Leona, but he always

called her Lena), listen to this’, he’d say. And you were supposed to be studying, keeping quiet, when we weren’t pinching each other, and all that, you know! You had to block out all the confusion. I can concentrate very well regardless, and I think it’s because of that.”

“Now I don’t know if anyone else did this, but my mother always set the table ready for breakfast the night before. We’d set it as usual for Christmas breakfast, but when we came downstairs on Christmas morning, the plates would be changed. Instead of the regular plates there would be deep plates, and they’d be heaped high with fruit and candy. We’d get an orange, which was very rare in those days, and an apple, and raisins, and candy...half of it hard candy.”



Helen L. Smith, 1911

*Swinging bridge over Carroll Creek
at Bentz Street, by Helen L. Smith*

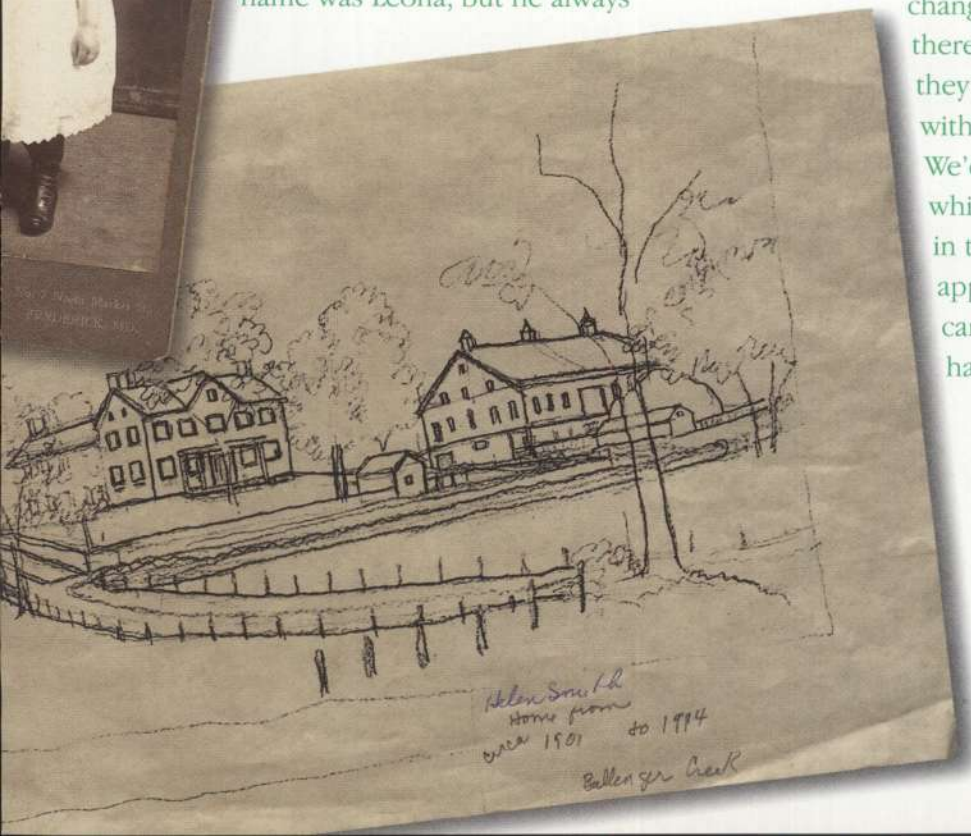
Helen Leona Smith, at age 2, with sister Ruth

The Smith home on Ballenger Creek Pike

*Smith's silhouette of her mother,
Nellie Leona Thomas Smith*



Helen Leona Smith
at age 2, with sister Ruth

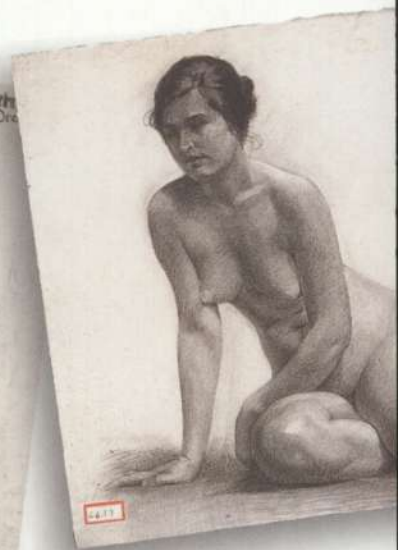
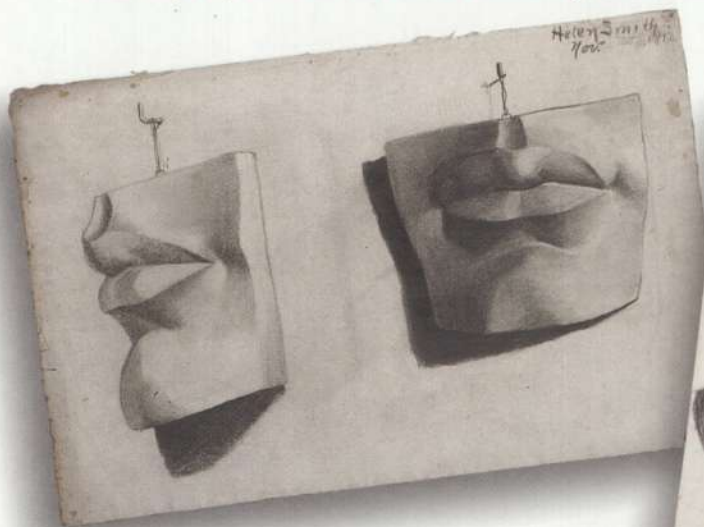


*Helen Smith
Home from
since 1901 to 1914
Ballenger Creek*



STUDENT Helen L. Smith was awarded a scholarship to the Maryland Institute of Art in Baltimore, Maryland, where her talent was recognized and flourished in a formal art environment. On the first day at school she peeked into some of the classrooms and had the shock of her life. “There were life size plaster models of nude men and women, and no fig leaves!”

While attending the Maryland Institute, Smith lived with her Uncle Dudrow Thomas in Baltimore. She was expected to help with the five children and the housework. One day while washing the dishes, one of the children was telling about the flowers being studied at school. After explaining that heartsease were small pansies, the child turned to Smith and said, “That’s what we will call you.” From that day on, she was called “Heartsie” by all the family.



Smith at age 17; examples of Smith art done at the Maryland Institute of Art



Helen Smith
Feb. 27, 1913.



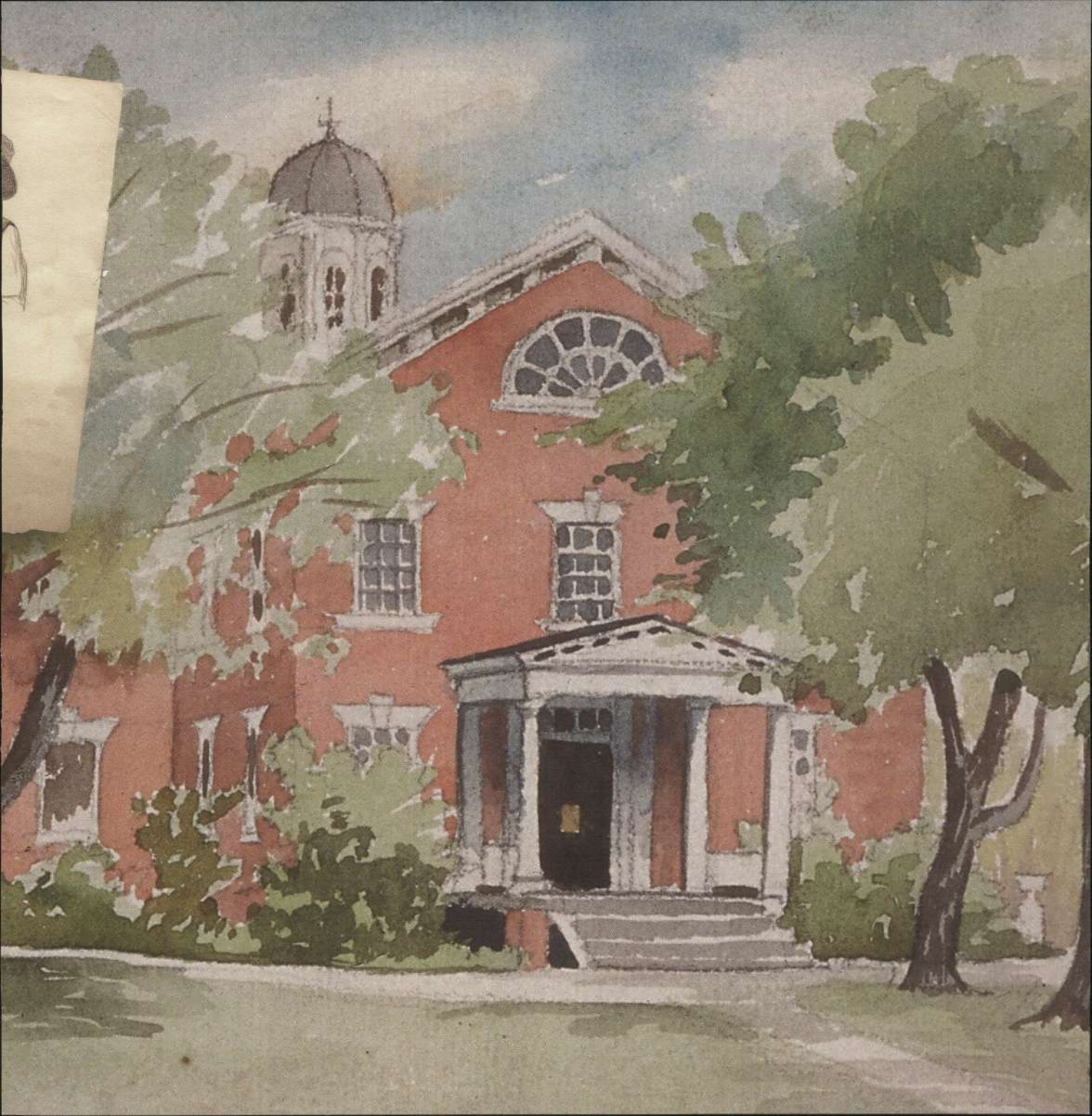
TEACHER

Helen L. Smith taught art at Hood College from 1916 to 1924, serving as head of the art department for the last four years. In the beginning she taught and lived in Winchester Hall in downtown Frederick (the original site of the college); later she moved to Brodbeck Music Hall on the new campus, teaching in the art studios on the second floor and living in an apartment on the top floor.

I had to attend the faculty meetings, you know, and I would sit behind the door where President [Joseph Henry] Apple couldn't see me. The meetings were so boring I sketched Dr. Apple or the faculty to keep from falling asleep."

A hand-painted Smith plate featuring Winchester Hall; Smith's drawings of Hood College faculty members; a Smith watercolor of Brodbeck Music Hall on the Hood campus.







TRAVELER Helen L.

Smith's natural curiosity and varied interests allowed her to make the most of any opportunity for travel, whether in this country or abroad. In her meticulously detailed travel diaries she faithfully records each place visited. Her written accounts—ranging from poetic descriptions of

the scenery's natural beauty to comments on a particular hotel's lack of hot water—fill each diary's page to the very edge. Occasional small pen and ink illustrations add charm to her written descriptions.

"I just finished sketching a little girl on the ship and now she is getting even by drawing me while I write. If I looked like what she drew I'd want to jump overboard, but she is happy about it anyway..."

European travel challenged Smith to broaden her outlook, and her diary reflects that change in attitude.



She admits to no longer being so easily shocked. "Sure will be hardened after this trip, with the boat's stewards always in the bathrooms and doing everything but scrubbing your back."



“There are some real old women on our tour.
I’m sure some of them are 70.”

Letter to Mother, July 3, 1928

On a 1930 transcontinental trip, Smith went to the Grand Canyon, the Canadian Rockies, and California, where she embarked from Los Angeles on the Panama

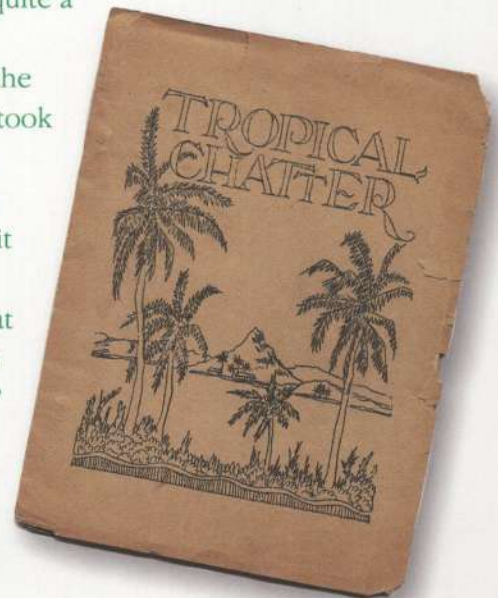
Mail steamship S.S. Ecuador for a 28-day cruise. As with her European travels, Smith set down in a separate travel diary her impressions of exotic

Central/South American ports of call, including passage through the Panama Canal. Along with a vivid description of Panama’s lush tropical greenery, she devotes two tightly-written pages to the operation of the canal and its locks, noting the canal is 34 miles long and rises over the mountain ridge at 312 feet.

Aboard ship, Smith found herself in demand as a bridge partner and as an amateur fortune teller. “We had the farewell dinner last night, and everybody ‘dolled’ up,” she writes near the end of the voyage. “Danced a lot which was quite a surprise. A number of the youngsters took a notion to dance with me—maybe it was the fortunes that put them in the notion.”

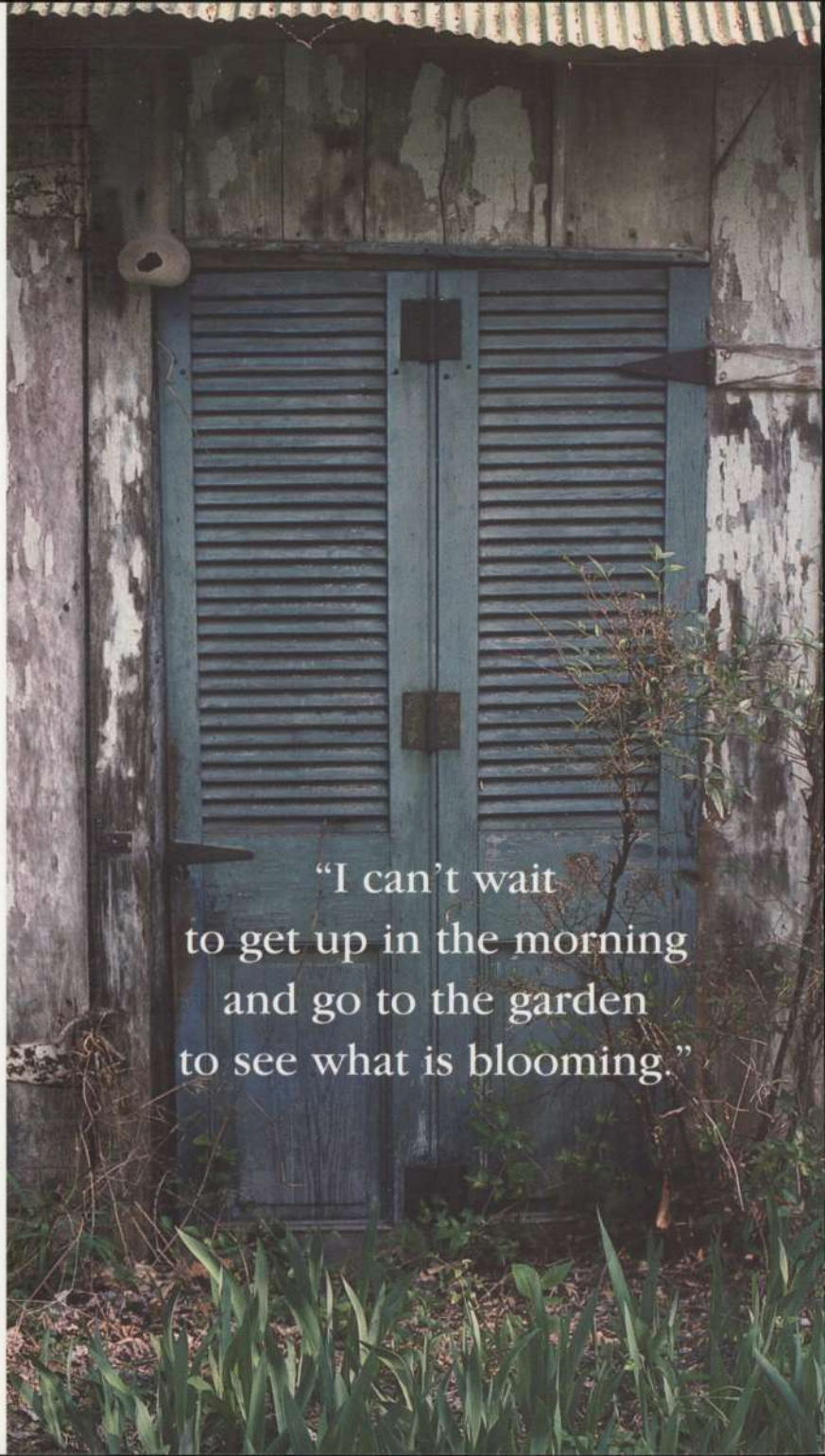


Smith’s 1930 travel diary; Smith and friends aboard the T. S. S. Cameronia in 1928; Smith’s watercolor of a Venice scene; a Smith photograph of an Indian village at Grand Canyon; Smith’s cover illustration for the ship’s newsletter for passengers.



GARDENER

Blue eyes twinkling, Helen L. Smith often said, "I can't wait to get up in the morning and go to the garden to see what is blooming." Inspiration for the florals she painted—on china, chairs, clock faces, trays, and jewelry—came from the blue bells, violets, green trillium, red roses, purple iris, pink and blue forget-me-nots, white peonies, yellow lady's slipper, and orange columbine that grew in profusion outside her small, white cottage. She loved wildflowers and encouraged aspiring gardeners, saying, "In the beginning I didn't know a weed from a plant." She designed her gardens for continuous color harmony, the flowers her palette and the flowerbeds her canvas.



"I can't wait
to get up in the morning
and go to the garden
to see what is blooming."



“When you do houses, you have to put in the houses’ windows and panes in the windows, but flowers are fine. If you have too many, or too few petals, who knows? I don’t care, because I’m not doing them for anybody; I’m doing them for me. But then they get sold. One I framed last week was here about three hours. I thought, “Oh, my land. I wanted to look at that a while longer!”

To develop her wildflower gardens, with their hundreds of varieties of plants and flowers, Smith visited woods that she had known as a child to gather ferns, blood root, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and Solomon’s seal. She purchased rare and scarce plants from nurseries, and she

improved the soil with bushels of “woody” dirt, using pine needles for mulching acid loving plants. She advised wildflower gardeners to let fallen leaves lie. “In no time, things will come up,” she reassured them, explaining that a wildflower garden is sheer pleasure with no cultivating chores. “Your only challenge is to curb the aggressive plants to protect the delicate ones.”

Smith’s garden included thirty species of ferns, many of which she transplanted from woods surrounding her home.



The carriage house at Smith’s home and Smith’s watercolor of the same; a Smith watercolor of the pump outside her kitchen door. On the following pages, a photograph of Smith’s home; and three Smith florals, two on canvas and one on a tray.

A sampling of flowers, trees,
shrubs, and herbs from Miss
Smith's garden:

trifoliated orange hydrangea

spirea

viburnum

miscanthus

lirope

potentilla

boxwood

amelanchier nandine

mabonia

camellia

barberry

hibiscus

creeping charlie

wild gooseberry

mock orange

dogwood

quince

peonies

trandescantia

lily of the valley

azalea

day lilies

redbud

money plant

mole plant

grapes

coltubine

forsythia

rhododendron

wisteria

yeat

mint

sweet autumn clematis

iris

poppy

vinca

lilac

roses

chives

named clematis

forget-me-nots

phlox

bleeding heart

osage orange.





JUSTICE



HILLEN

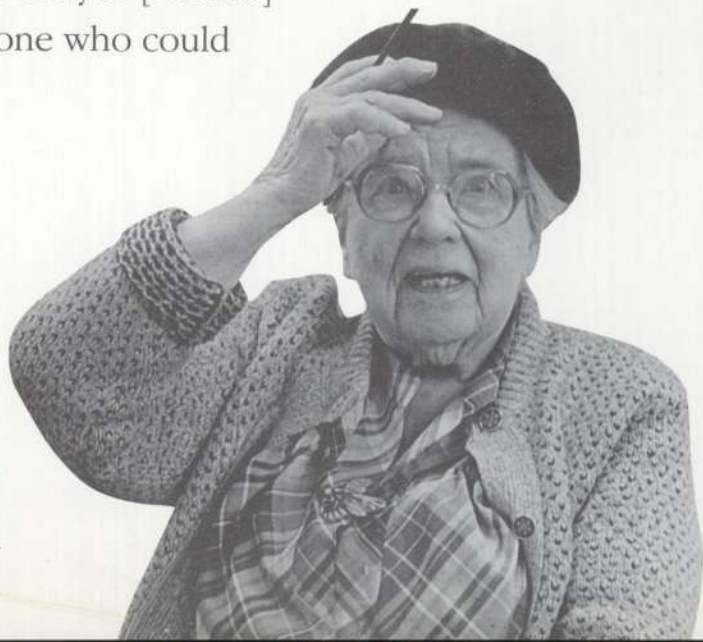


JUSTICE Helen L. Smith achieved national acclaim in 1985 when she restored *Justice*, a work commissioned by the Daughters of the American Revolution for the Frederick County Courthouse in 1924. The painting, to be hung over the judge's bench, was so large that she had to order the canvas from New York. She started working on the painting in the living room of her home on Ballenger Creek Pike and then had to ask her brother to deliver it to the courthouse in their largest

horse-drawn wagon. Bowers Lumber Company made the frame, curved at the top, and she stretched the oval-topped canvas herself. In 1953, during a remodeling project, the painting was taken down, rolled, stored in the attic and forgotten. Smith did not forget. "I knew exactly where it was," she said years later. When the building was bought by the City in 1985, the painting was rediscovered. "Mayor [Ronald] Young asked me if I knew anyone who could restore it..."

**"And I thought,
well darn,
if it's the last thing I do
I'm going to do it myself."**

Helen L. Smith on restoring Justice.





A large mural painting of Justice was unveiled in the Frederick Court House, Friday evening, October 3, [1924] in memory of Roger Brooke Taney, fifth Chief Justice of the United States, and a member of the Frederick bar for a number of years. The painting is the work of Miss Helen L. Smith, head of the Hood College Art Department. The mural is the artist's conception of a seated Justice, holding balanced scales in her left hand, while the right grasps a sword. The Maryland shield is at her right, and at her foot is the bound book of law. The heroic figure, draped in classic garments, is placed in a peaceful landscape.

The Blue and Grey, Hood College, October 17, 1924

"They called me when they found it, all excited. The old employees were gone and the new ones knew nothing about it. And they said, would I come in and look at it. There were a lot of streaks across it from being rolled."

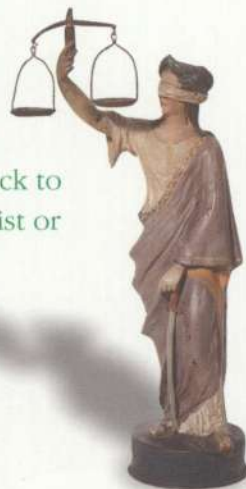
Helen Smith on restoring Justice

Restoring the painting took just over a month. Smith began by cleaning the

canvas with a brush and a vacuum cleaner. She stripped its protective coat of varnish and mixed and matched oil colors to bring the faded brush strokes back to life. "I can't kneel because of my arthritis, so I had to bend down from the waist or just sit down on it to work," she said.

The Washington Post, 1985

Smith in 1985 at work restoring the 10 x 8 foot painting; photos by Harriet Wise. Sculpture was painted by Smith.





SHOPKEEPER It was Helen L. Smith's work as a commercial artist—a career spanning more than three-quarters of a century—that made her one of Frederick's best-known artists. For Smith the challenge was to never say no. "It didn't enter my mind that I couldn't do it." From the beginning she accepted an amazing array of commissioned work, from designing newspaper advertisements to decorating furniture to painting local landmarks.

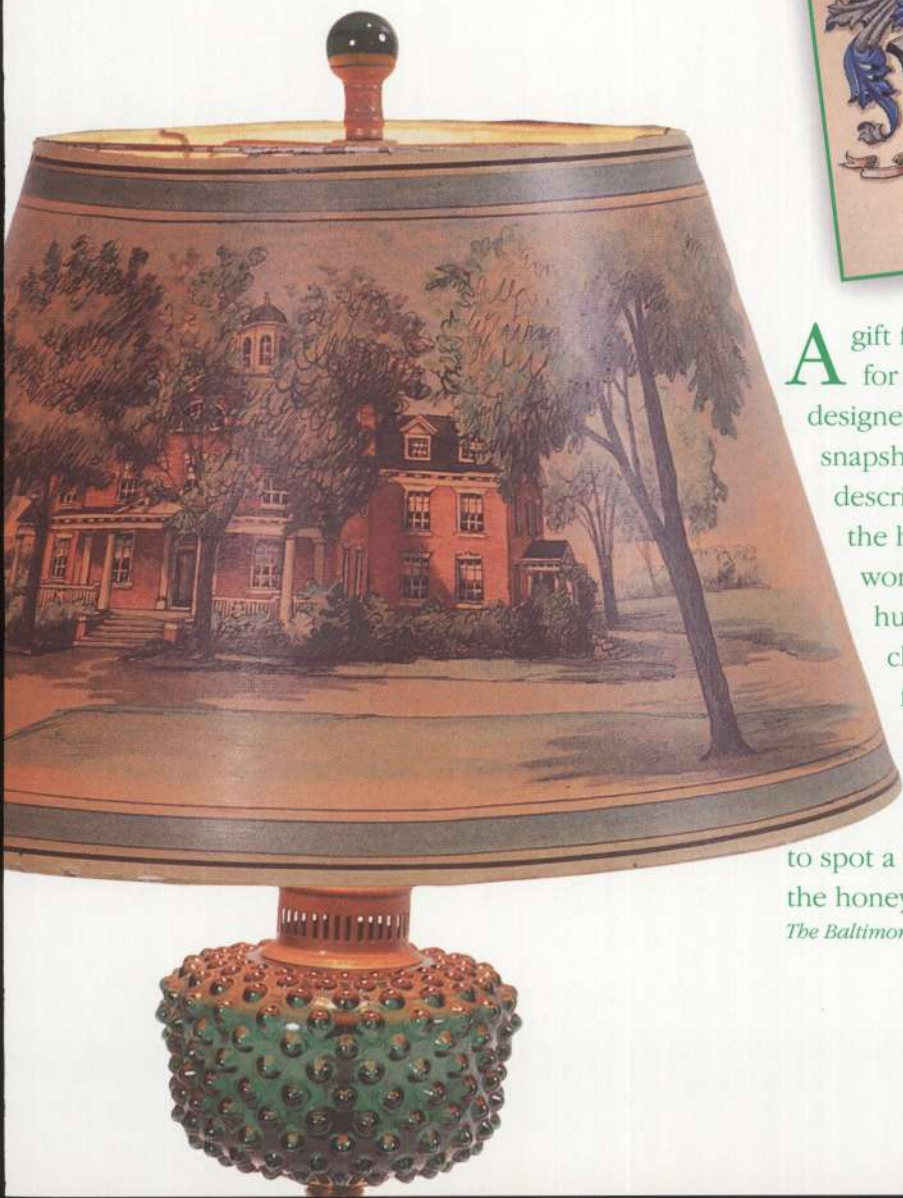
"I began to think about doing something else, opening a shop and just painting. Of course, everybody thought I had lost all my marbles. I had saved enough that I figured I could make it for at least a few months, and if it didn't work, well I'd give it up. But it worked."

Frederick News-Post, January 14, 1984



The art of Helen L. Smith:
decorated household items
trays
hand-painted china
scarfs
baskets
canisters
bowls
book plates
Christmas cards
church bulletin covers
silhouettes
book marks
water colors
decorated blanket chests
logos
advertisements
book illustrations
coats of arms
wedding invitations
clock faces
oil paintings
miniatures
portraits
lamp shades
batik
murals
jewelry
china

“I do lots of coats of arms.
I stopped counting at 10,000.”



A gift fad that has kept her hard at work for several years is the individually designed lamp shade. An out-of-focus snapshot and a highly inaccurate description of a childhood scene “dear to the heart” are usually what she has to work from. Because she has done hundreds of them, however, the chances are the buyer will find the finished shade matching exactly his memory of the old home place. “You get a feel for them,” Smith says. “Somehow you know where to spot a weeping willow and where to twine the honeysuckle. That’s all there is to it.”

The Baltimore Sun, 1948

ARTIST Helen L. Smith was once described as an artist who “worked in the real American tradition,” that is to say she did “everything that required pictorial and decorative skill, whether or not it was considered ‘fine art.’” The accomplished life-drawings and copies from casts that date from her student days reveal a gift that was recognized and encouraged by her teachers at the Maryland Institute. She used that talent to forge her own way, blending artistic zeal with an honest work ethic. Yet her art reflects an awareness and understanding of modern artistic trends. Her uncomplicated, beautiful version of *Justice* reveals her recognition of the revival of the art of the mural. In her graphic design, Smith showed an affinity for the elegant lines of art nouveau. Yet Smith did not pursue “art for art’s sake;” she simply incorporated aspects of recent or emerging fine arts styles into her practical repertoire of art. But, unlike her early American predecessors who pursued their livelihoods through the semi-nomadic wanderings of itinerant painters, Helen L. Smith was Frederick’s own.







A sampling of Smith's work displays her skill at using this early decorative style on trays, boxes, coffee pots, bowls, and chairs. On the following pages are hand-painted plates depicting Frederick County landmarks.











Smith hand-painted china and fired it in her kiln, giving most of the pieces to her family as gifts. She decorated furniture and excelled at tole. Shown in the photo at left are examples of Smith's hand-painted chairs, china, a tray, canister, and watering can.

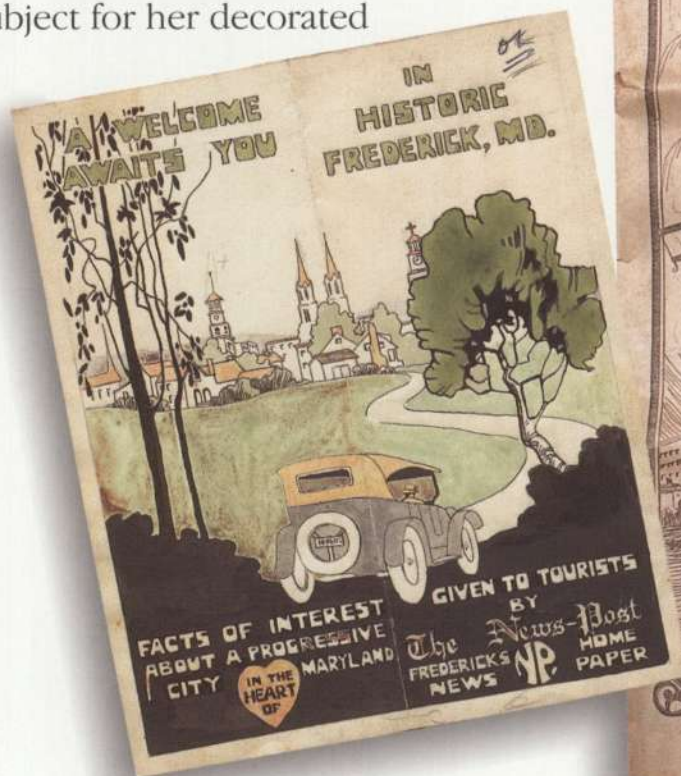


John Jessler & Son
FREDERICK TOWN



Smith painted and restored many clock faces, including her own John Fessler clock, with églomisé panel. She excelled in decorating furniture, as seen in this blanket chest, which she gave as a gift to the City of Frederick. Smith kept an extensive file of designs for use in decorating a variety of objects, including the box shown here. She took special pride in her églomisé portraits of James and Dolly Madison, now on exhibit at Hood College.

Smith's three-color circular, designed to promote tourism in historic Frederick County, was commissioned by the *Frederick News-Post* as was the front cover of the Special New Press Edition, which appeared in the *Frederick News-Post* on March 2, 1922. Both are excellent examples of her talent for graphic design. The artist often searched antique shops and flea markets for the objects on which she painted, including old metal trays. Frederick's clustered spires were often the subject for her decorated pieces, including hand-painted china.

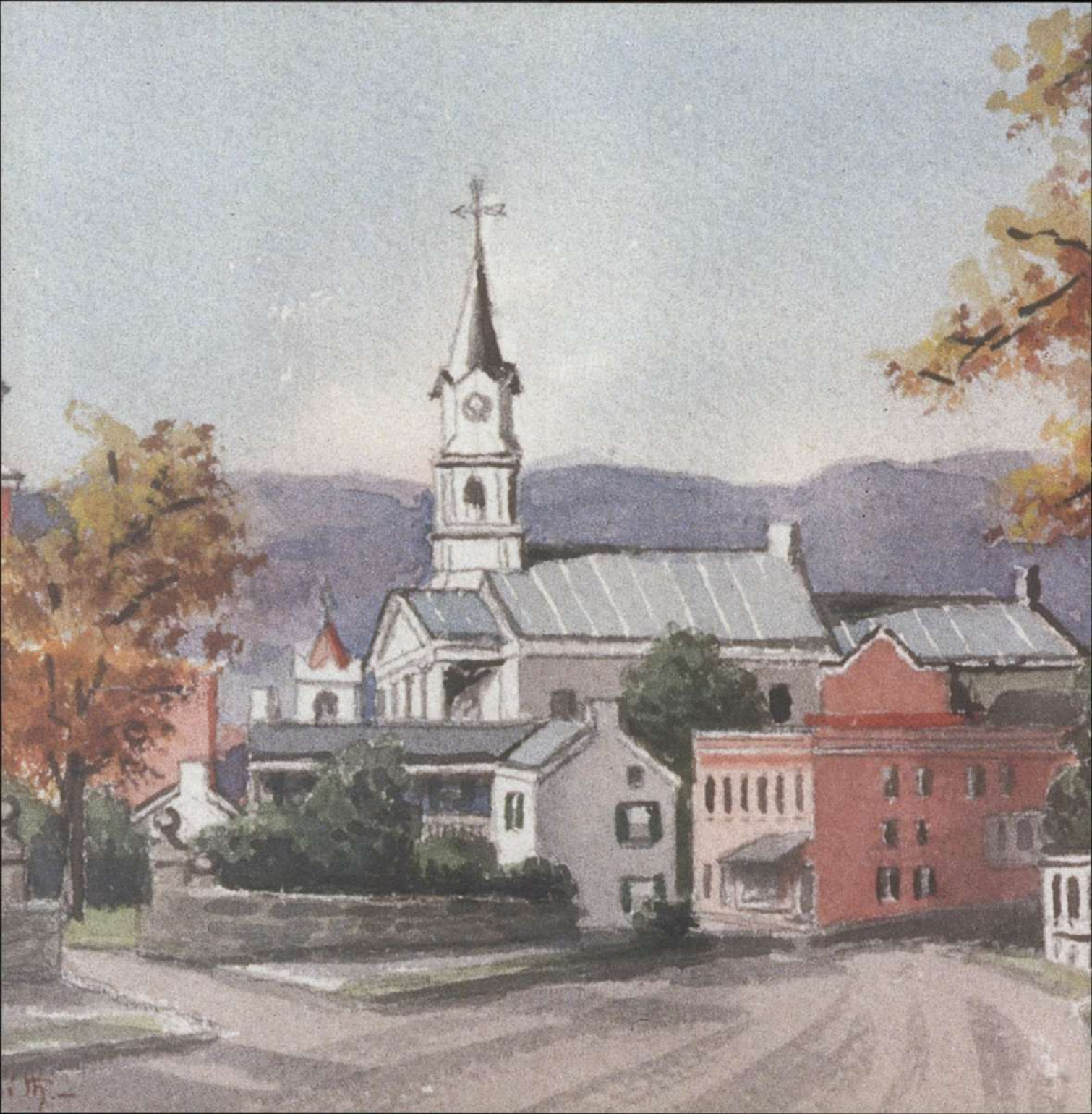


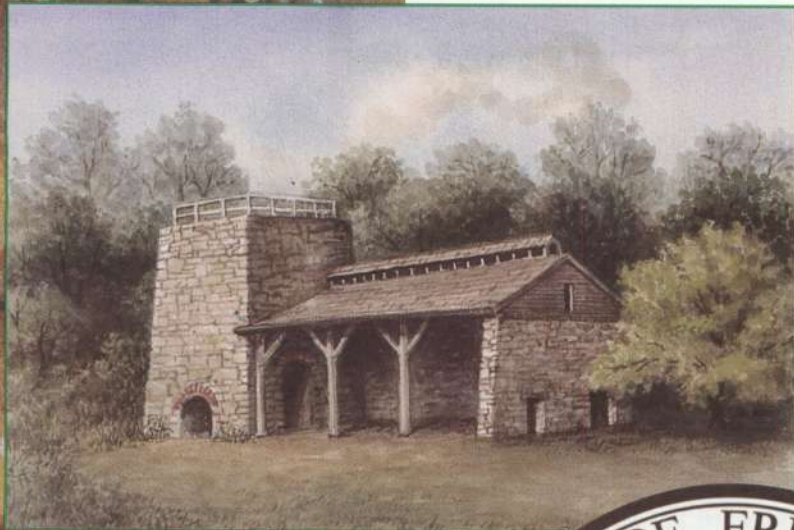
FREDERICK

SPECIAL
NEW PRESS
EDITION
of

the ~~Frederick Post~~ News
and
the Frederick Post
FREDERICK, MD







Smith was well-known for her paintings of Frederick County's homes, landmarks and historic sites, including views of Middletown, Maryland, Catoctin Furnace, and downtown Frederick. In 1945 Smith designed a logo featuring the clustered spires for Frederick City's bicentennial; in 1979 she updated the design and it was adopted as Frederick City's seal.





VENI-VIDI-VICI



Smith often painted in styles of earlier eras. A fine example of her ability to adapt her style of painting to the subject matter is this oil of the famed Lily of the Swamp engine, which hangs over the mantel at the United Fire Company No. 3 in Frederick, Maryland. The painting with its frontal formality, gives the appearance of having been done in the mid-19th century, when the Lily of the Swamp would have been a new arrival at the firehouse.

SAMPLER





Left to right, clockwise:

Helen L. Smith
drawing from classical cast
pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in.
courtesy of Frederick Art Club
signed upper right: H. Smith
April 30, 1914

Helen L. Smith
drawing from classical cast of head
pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in.
courtesy of Frederick Art Club
signed upper right: Helen Smith,
October 27, 1911



Helen L. Smith
life-study of nude
pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in.
courtesy of Frederick Art Club
signed upper right: H. Smith

Helen L. Smith
drawing from classical cast of head
pencil on paper, 30 x 22 in.
courtesy of Frederick Art Club
unsigned

Left to right, clockwise:

Helen L. Smith, *Middletown Valley*,
1940

oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in.

private collection

unsigned

Helen L. Smith

study for mural, watercolor on paper

5 x 10 in.

courtesy of Frederick Art Club

unsigned

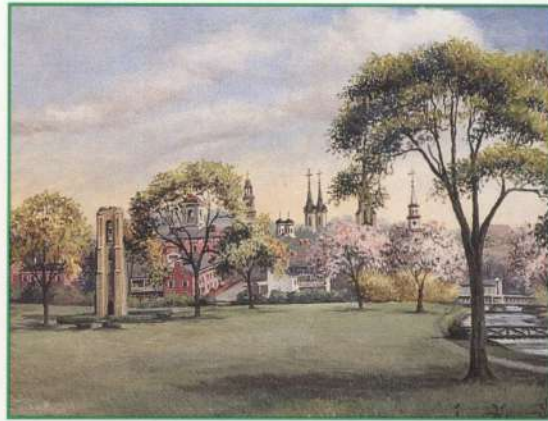
Helen L. Smith, *Ascension*, 1920

mural, Masonic Temple

private collection

unsigned





Left to right, clockwise:
Helen L. Smith, *Field of Shocked Corn*
oil on canvas, 9 x 12 in.
private collection
signed lower right: H. L. S.

Helen L. Smith, *Clustered Spires*
oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in.
private collection
signed lower right: H. L. Smith

Helen L. Smith, *Miriam Apple*
oil on canvas, 29 1/2 x 24 1/2 in.
courtesy of Hood College
signed lower right: H.L.Smith

Left to right, clockwise

Helen L. Smith

tole tray, 22 x 29 in.

private collection

signed center bottom: Helen Smith



Helen L. Smith

tole tray, 12 ³/₄ x 17 ¹/₂ in.

private collection

unsigned



Helen L. Smith

tole coal bucket, 10 x 16 x 8 ¹/₂ in. base

private collection





Left to right, clockwise
Helen L. Smith
tole coal hod, 19 x 19 x 13 in.
private collection
signed inside lid: H.L.S.

Helen L. Smith
tole coffee canister with lid, 7 1/2 x 5 1/2
x 5 1/2 in.
private collection
unsigned

Helen L. Smith
tole watering can 6 x 10 in.
private collection
unsigned



This page:

Helen L. Smith
tole shell tray, 10 x 12 in.
courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection: Art
and Papers, Hood College
unsigned

Helen L. Smith
tole, fluted tray, 10 x 11 in.
courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection: Art
and Papers, Hood College
unsigned



Following page:

Helen L. Smith
tole, canister with lid, 13 x 8 in.
in diameter
private collection
unsigned

Helen L. Smith
tole oil can 12 x 6 x 6 in.
private collection
unsigned



Left to right, clockwise
Helen L. Smith
tole coffee pot, 8 1/2 x 6 in. diameter
Courtesy of Helen L. Smith
Collection: Art and Papers, Hood
College
unsigned

Helen L. Smith
tole square canister, 8 x 5 in.
private collection
unsigned

Helen L. Smith, *Jug Bridge*
tole cream can, 17 x 9 3/4 in. diameter
private collection
signed middle lower right:
H. L. Smith
unsigned





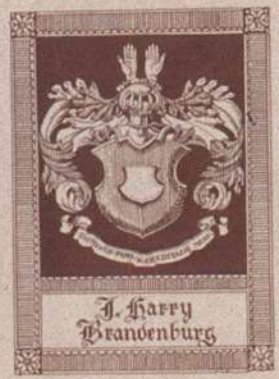
Helen L. Smith, *This Book Belongs to Helen Smith*
 watercolor on paper, 3 1/2 x 2 1/4 in.
 courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
 Art and Papers, Hood College

Helen L. Smith
 collection of bookplates, mixed media
 courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
 Art and Papers, Hood College





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J. Harry
Brandenburg



Edward S. Delaplaine



Ex Libris
Frances Elizabeth Robinson



Ignatius Bjorlee



Cornelia C. Bjorlee



Ignatius Bjorlee



Parsons Newman



Jaskers
Chace
Garden Club



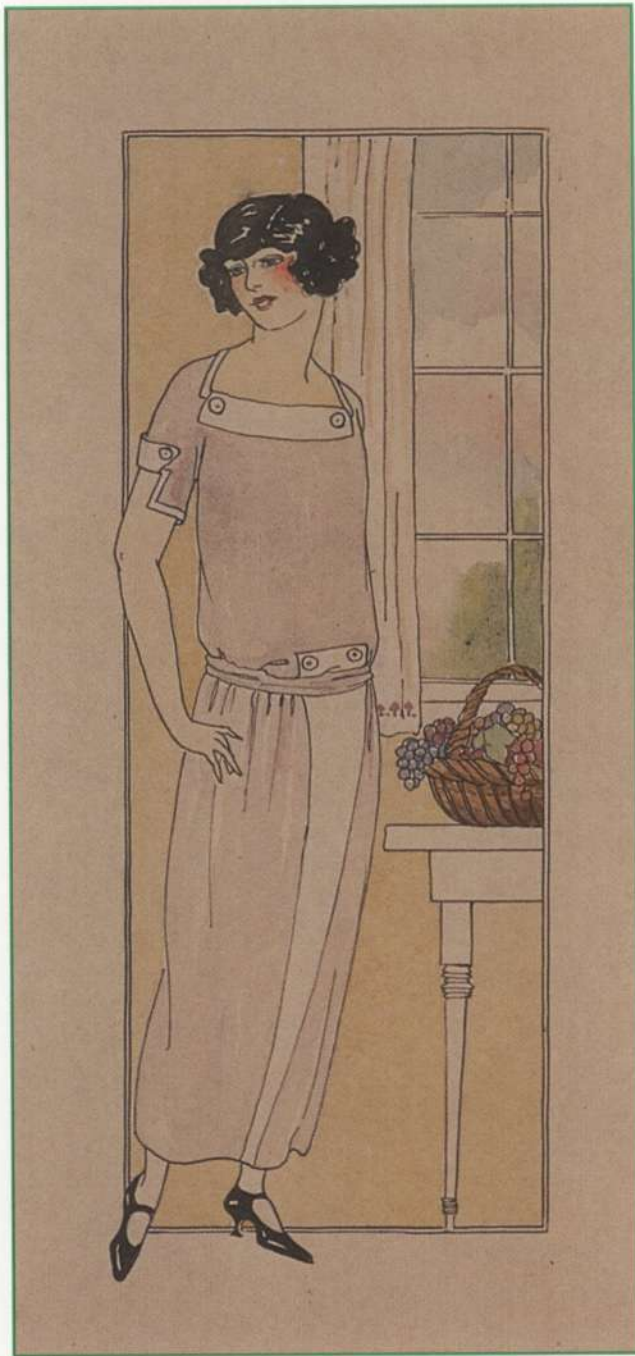
ELSIE H. WOLFE



Miriam Rankin Apple



ROLAND SWAIN



Left to right, clockwise

Helen L. Smith

watercolor on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.

private collection

signed middle right: Helen Smith, 1991

Helen L. Smith

watercolor on paper, 12 x 8 3/4 in.

private collection

unsigned

Helen L. Smith

watercolor on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.

private collection

signed middle right: Helen L. Smith,
1988



List of Art

- | | | | |
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| 2-3 | Helen L. Smith, detail from <i>Floral</i> ,
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courtesy of Frederick Art Club
unsigned |
| 5 | Helen L. Smith, <i>Justice</i> , 1924
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signed lower right: Helen L. Smith | 20 | Helen L. Smith
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| 11 | Helen L. Smith, <i>The Palette Shop</i>
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Private collection, photograph courtesy
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courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
Art and Papers, Hood College
unsigned | | |

- 21 Helen L. Smith
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signed middle right: H.L. Smith
- 22 Helen L. Smith
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10 1/2 in. diameter
private collection
unsigned
- 22 Helen L. Smith, *Dr. Shaw, Miss Rose Birely*
pencil on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 in.
courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection: Art
and Papers, Hood College
unsigned
- 23 Helen L. Smith, *Brodbeck Music Hall*
watercolor on paper, 7 x 10 1/2 in.
courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
Art and Papers, Hood College
signed lower left: Helen L. Smith
unsigned
- 25 Helen L. Smith, *Venice*
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private collection
signed lower right: Helen Smith
- 25 Helen L. Smith, *Tropical Chatter*, 1928
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8 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.
courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
Art and Papers, Hood College
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- 27 Helen L. Smith, *Carriage House*, 1989
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private collection
signed lower left: Helen L. Smith
- 27 Helen L. Smith, *The Pump*, 1989
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private collection
signed lower right: Helen L. Smith
- 29 Helen L. Smith, *Floral Bouquet*, 1961
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private collection
signed lower right: Helen L. Smith
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private collection
unsigned
- 29 Helen L. Smith, *Floral Bouquet*
oil on canvas, 10 x 8 in.
private collection
signed lower right: H. L. S.

- 30 Helen L. Smith, *Justice*, 1924
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signed lower right: Helen L. Smith
- 31 Helen L. Smith, *Justice*, 1924
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unsigned
- 35 Helen L. Smith, *Brodbeck Music Hall*
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- 35 Helen L. Smith, *Schley*
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private collection
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unsigned
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- 40-41 Helen L. Smith
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private collection and courtesy of Helen
L. Smith Collection: Art and Papers, Hood
College
signed back of plate, middle: Helen L.
Smith
- 40-41 Helen L. Smith
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diameter
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Art and Papers, Hood College
signed back of plate, middle: H. L. S. and
H. L. Smith

- 42-43 Helen L. Smith
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two painted wooden chairs, two tole
pieces
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unsigned
- 44 Helen L. Smith
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private collection
unsigned
- 45 Helen L. Smith
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courtesy, City of Frederick, Md.
signed inside lid, lower left corner:
Helen L. Smith
- 45 Helen L. Smith
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15 1/2 in. diameter, 6 in. depth
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- 45 Helen L. Smith, *James Madison*
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courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
Art and Papers, Hood College
unsigned
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courtesy of Helen L. Smith Collection:
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- 46 Helen L. Smith, *In Historic Frederick,
Md., 1922*
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- 46-47 Helen L. Smith, *Special New Press
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unsigned
- 48-49 Helen L. Smith, *Main Street*,
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- 49 Helen L. Smith, *9 W. Second St.*,
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private collection
signed lower right: H. L. Smith
- 50-51 Helen L. Smith, *Lily of the Swamp*, 1954
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private collection
unsigned
- 64 Helen L. Smith
hand-painted plate, Helen L. Smith's
home in Old Braddock,
10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter
private collection
unsigned

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Acknowledgements

It is with grateful appreciation that we acknowledge the dedicated work of the members of the Helen L. Smith Book and Studio Project Committee, who each time they met were inspired anew by the incredible spirit of Smith's life. *Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith*, was researched and written by a group of volunteers whose common goal was to see the life and art of Helen L. Smith documented for future generations. Members of the Helen L. Smith Book and Studio Project Committee include: Project Coordinator, Anne Snyder, Anne Colliver, Betsy Day, Dorothy Davis, Joy Derr, Anne-Lynn Gross, Elinor Grove, Marcia Hall, Helen Hammond, Ann Lebherz, Susan Luce, Charles Main, Peg Mauzy, Theresa Michel, Linda Moran, Cathy Moreland, Bill Nicklas, Lorraine Nicklas, Virginia Patrick, Frances Randall, Elizabeth Shatto, and Harriet Wise.

The art and memorabilia reproduced in this book were made available through the generosity of the following individuals and organizations: Mrs. Robert Clapp, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard I. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. George B. Delaplaine Jr., the Frederick Art Club, the City of Frederick, Anne-Lynn Gross, Elinor F. Grove, Marcia Hall, Harry M. Hobbs, Hood College, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lebherz, Ralph E. F. May, Jane McClellan, Mr. and Mrs. Delbert Null, Alan Owen, Mr. and Mrs. William C. Patrick, the United Steam Fire Engine Company No. 3, Mr. and Mrs. Myron Randall, the family of Helen L. Smith, and Ann B. Walsh.

Special recognition must be given to the family of Helen L. Smith who donated Smith's letters, notebooks, travel diaries, photo albums, correspondence, business ledgers, drawings, and selected pieces of art to Hood College. This archival collection, located in the Beneficial-Hodson Library, is known as the Helen L. Smith Collection: Art & Papers. It is an important historic

resource for the Frederick community. Charles Kuhn, former director of the Beneficial-Hodson Library at Hood College, noted, "Librarians and archivists too-often witness the historic record of accomplished lives dispersed, neglected or destroyed. That will not happen to the legacy of Helen L. Smith. Your extraordinary efforts to collect and document the artifacts of Miss Helen's life will guarantee that she remains an inspiration to future generations."

The project would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of the following individuals, businesses, and organizations: C. Kurt Holter, Irene Kirilloff, Ann Lebherz, Dana Lough, Cindy Powell, Julie Till, Mrs. Philip Wertheimer, Dawn McKinnon, Harriet Wise, the Office of Communication and Public Relations staff at Hood College, the Community Foundation of Frederick County, Hood College, Corporate Color, the Frederick Art Club, the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Tasker's Chance Garden Club, Zonta Club, The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center, and Stone Manor.

We regret that it is not possible to acknowledge the hundreds of people who graciously responded to the committee's request for documentation of Smith's art. The committee was overwhelmed by the many people who completed questionnaires documenting the Smith art that they owned. This material has been included in the Helen L. Smith Collection: Art & Papers to provide a sampling of the scope and diversity of the work that Smith produced during her lifetime.

To all of you, Thank You!

The
Helen L. Smith
Endowed Scholarship Fund for Children and the Arts

The Helen L. Smith Fund, held at the Community Foundation of Frederick County, was established to benefit future generations of children and youth who wish to explore the visual arts through classes at The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center.

As with all endowment funds, gifts made to the Helen Smith Fund will be invested and the income earned on the fund each year will be used for scholarships at the Center. Just as Helen L. Smith's career as an artist began with scholarship assistance, this fund, announced at her 100th birthday celebration in 1994, will provide today's young citizens with the opportunity to enjoy the wide array of visual arts promoted through the Center. Such support will certainly expand the horizons of many and may also be the spark that ignites the careers of Smith's successors.

Gifts may be made to the Helen L. Smith Fund at any time. For more information, contact the Community Foundation at 6 East Street, Everedy Square, Frederick, Maryland, 21701.

Credits

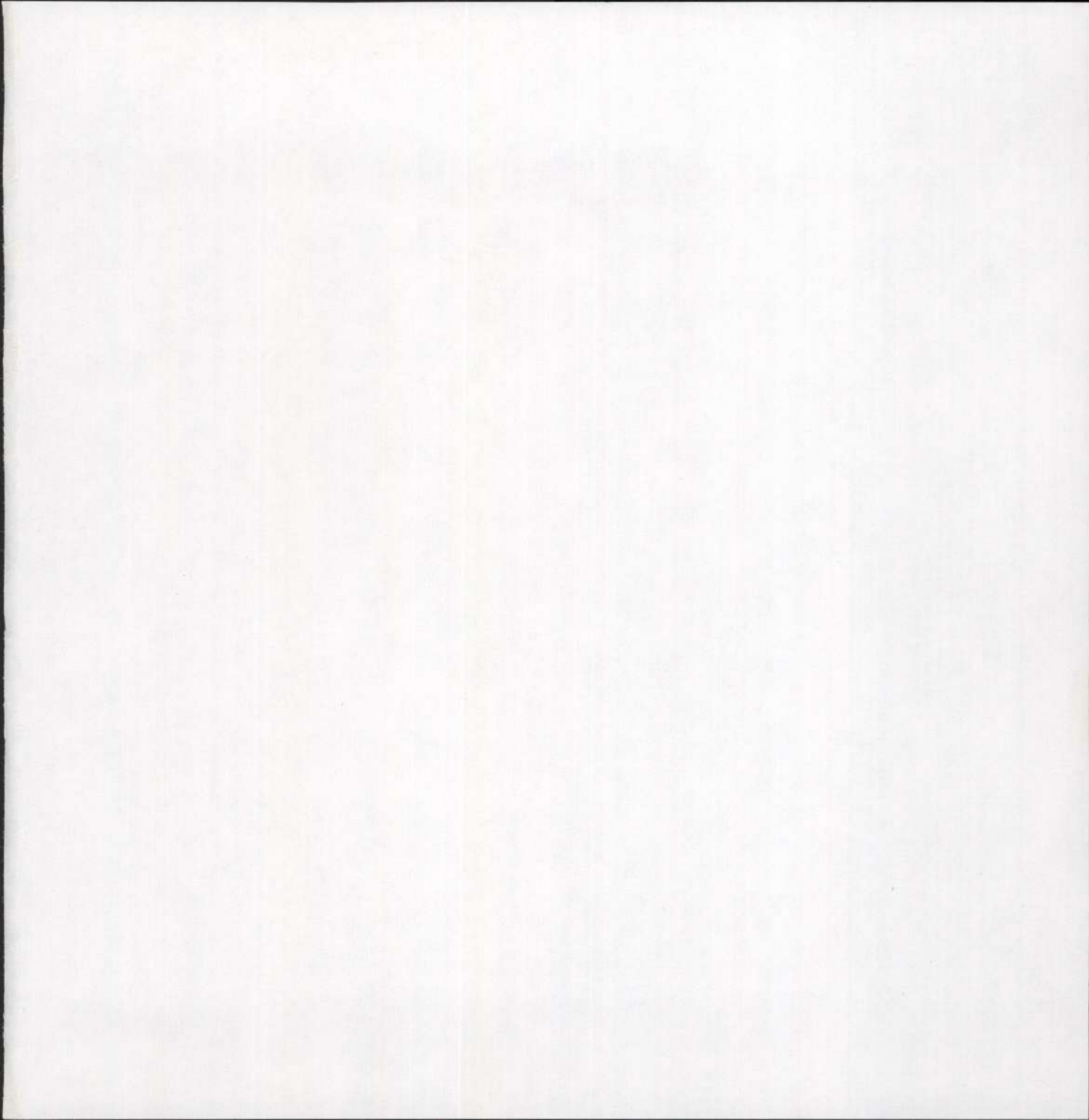
It is with great appreciation that we thank those individuals who provided the photographs used to illustrate *Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith*. Harriet Wise photographed most of the Helen L. Smith art for this book in 1998, as well as documented the restoration of *Justice* in 1985. Her photograph of Smith's home appears on pages 28-29. Several pieces of art were photographed by Edwin Remsberg, who took the photograph of Helen L. Smith found on the dedication page. C. Kurt Holter photographed and scanned much of the graphic art used to illustrate the book; one of his photographs of Smith is found on page 80. The photograph on page 17 was taken by Anne-Lynn Gross; the photograph on page 26 was taken by Kenneth Bromfield; and the photograph on page 14 was taken by Alan Owen.

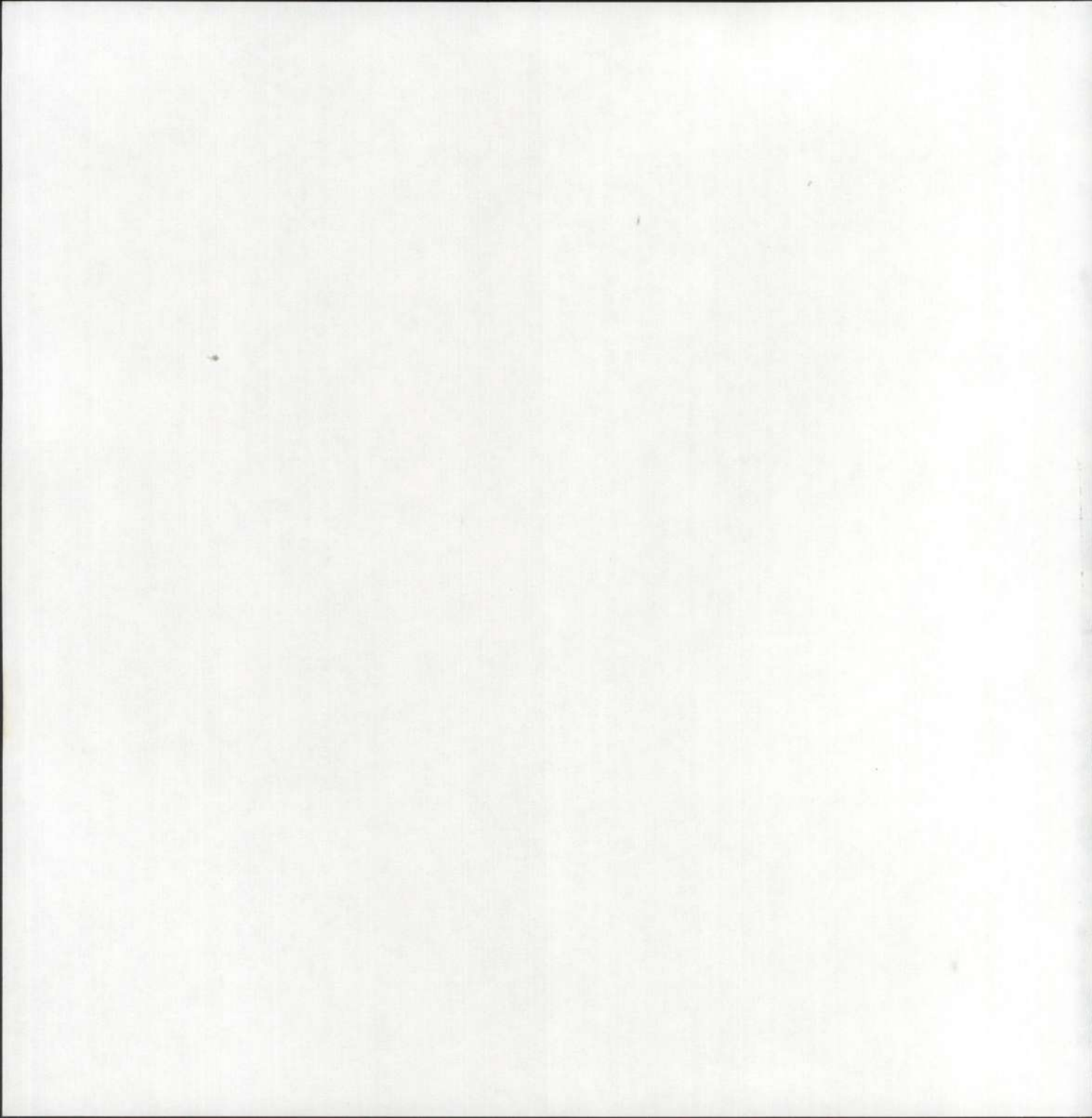
A very special thank you to Irene Kirilloff of Kirilloff Design who designed *Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith*, and to Dawn McKinnon who created the electronic document.

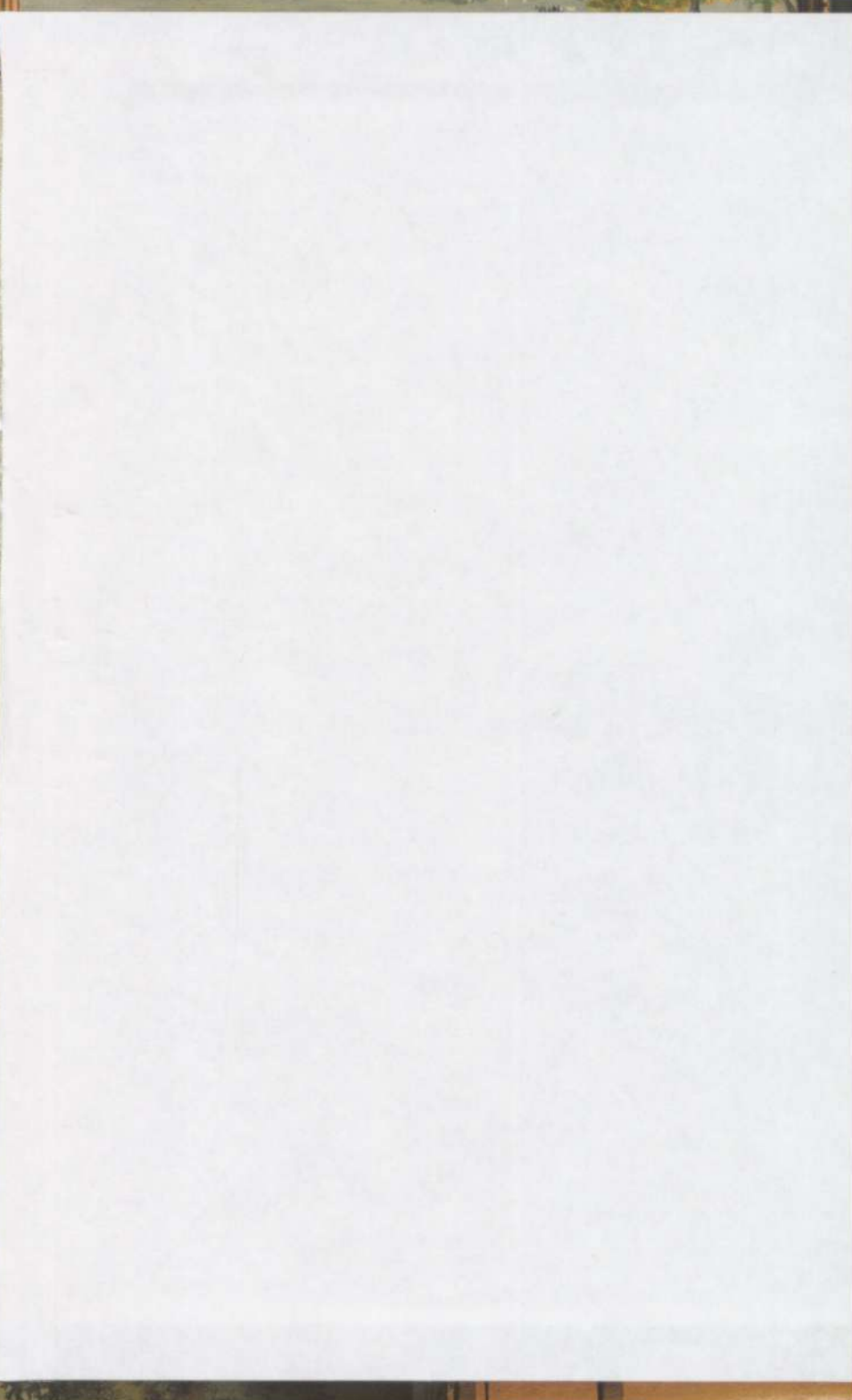


“ *It surely has all been wonderful.* ”

The final entry in one of Helen L. Smith's diaries.







Frederick's Legacy: The Art of Helen L. Smith was produced by the Helen L. Smith Book and Studio Project Committee, a group of Frederick County residents interested in preserving the legacy of artist Helen L. Smith. Most of the committee's research materials were presented to the Beneficial-Hodson Library at Hood College for its archival collection, The Helen L. Smith Collection: Art and Papers.

Proceeds from the book will support the Helen L. Smith Endowed Scholarship Fund for Children and the Arts, which enables young people to study art at The Delaplaine Visual Arts Center, Frederick, Maryland. Donations may be made to the Helen L. Smith Book and Studio Project in care of the Community Foundation of Frederick County.

Cover: Detail from the Helen L. Smith poster produced in honor of Smith's 100th birthday, January 21, 1994. Photo by Harriet Wise.

