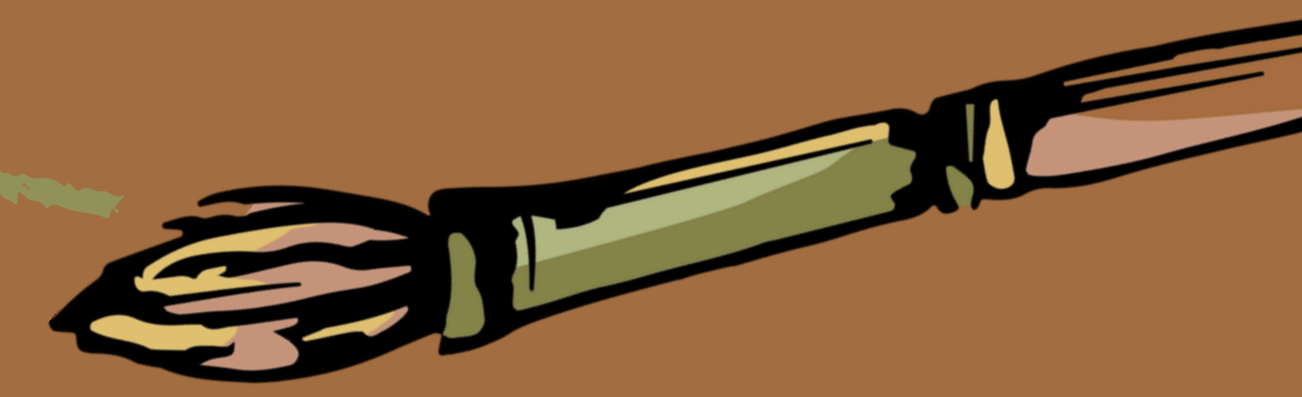




Helen Smith



Helen Leona Smith (1894-1997) displayed an aptitude for the visual arts at an early age. She was the eldest child of Howard Luther and Nellie Leona Thomas Smith and grew up on the family's farm, Locust Plains, south of Frederick. Helen attended a one-room schoolhouse near her home before traveling to Frederick to attend the Girls High School

on East Church Street. At the age of twelve, Helen won a contest for artwork she submitted to the Farmer's Journal. She received a set of watercolors as her prize.

Her parents discouraged Helen from pursuing further education in the arts, but her uncle, John Travers Smith, secured a scholarship for her to attend the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. Upon her graduation in 1916, Helen returned to Frederick and joined the faculty of Hood College, working under Florence Doub in the Art Department. During the next decade, Helen worked alongside Doub and joined the Frederick Art Club, becoming the organization's youngest member at the time.

Helen Smith was a versatile artist. Her media included oil, pastel, watercolor, and pencil sketching. She revived decorative arts practices with deep roots in the Frederick County community including toleware and painted furniture. Helen drew significant inspiration from Frederick County's landscape and historical landmarks. Some of her better known works include many depictions of Frederick's Clustered Spires, the old swinging bridge over Carroll Creek, and Jug Bridge, the historical crossing of the National Pike over the Monocacy River. Helen also painted works of a religious nature, creating murals in several Frederick County churches.



Florence Doub and Helen Smith

The Palette Shop

With a formal education and a network of people who appreciated her skill, Helen made the bold move of quitting her teaching position at Hood College and established her own studio, known as the Palette Shop. Upon its opening on North Market Street in 1925, the studio and shop became one of Frederick's first successful female-owned businesses.



The first setting of Helen Smith's Palette Shop was an old storeroom, which she rented from Philip Wertheimer, an insurance agent. The building had no running water or heat, except for a small stove. Helen and her business partner, Marion Spinning (another member of the Frederick Art Club and a Hood College graduate), installed a kiln in the shop to fire china, which Helen decorated with scenes of historic buildings around Frederick. Using wax paper decals, Helen's plates could be reproduced by the women she and Marion employed at the Palette Shop.

In addition to plates, the Palette Shop sold toleware trays and containers, painted furniture, lampshades, jewelry, and framed watercolor and oil paintings. Helen's paintings of Frederick County landscapes proved especially popular. The Palette Shop steadily grew and Helen moved the business to another location on North Market Street in 1935. Five years later, Helen purchased a house in Fairview on Catoctin Mountain west of Frederick and moved the Palette Shop to this new address. The business remained here for the remainder of its existence and Helen continued to turn out an incredible array of fine and decorative arts.



Frederick's *First Commercial Artist*

Helen Smith applied her skills to producing advertising and promotional materials for Frederick City government and local businesses. She created illustrations for local tourism pamphlets and covers for the annual Frederick News-Post yearbooks, works which reflect a broad range of styles including cartoons. Helen also created artwork for the local government, including a logo for the 1945 bicentennial celebration of the founding of Frederick. Helen chose a familiar subject for this logo, the Clustered Spires, which had been a nationally-known symbol of the city since their invocation in John Greenleaf Whittier's 1863 poem Barbara Frietchie. Over thirty years after she made the initial logo, Helen was asked by city officials to rework the piece into an official seal for Frederick. The seal was completed in 1979.



Commissioned Artwork



Helen Smith was widely known for images of well-known Frederick County landmarks, but her work was not confined to this theme. Throughout her career, Helen took commissions for portraits of Frederick County families or paintings of their homes. She created hundreds of coats of arms with heraldic symbols, which she researched herself. Other personalized works of art included silhouettes and bookplates, each uniquely crafted for her patrons.

Helen also contributed her talent to institutions around Frederick. In 1924, Helen painted a large-scale work known as "Justice," which was commissioned by the Daughters of the American Revolution and hung in the Frederick County Courthouse (now Frederick City Hall). She also painted a set of plates for the President's Residence at Hood College and created a portrait of Dr. Ignatius Bjorlee, superintendent of the Maryland School for the Deaf, which was presented to the school in 1951.



Portrait of Barbara Bowie George by Helen Smith

Preserving Frederick's History in Art

Throughout her career, Helen Smith used her brush and her interest in Frederick County history to portray places and events of the past. Some of these paintings imagined long-lost landmarks and events that occurred in the century before her lifetime. As an active member of the Historical Society of Frederick County and the head of its curatorial committee, Helen took an active role in preserving the material culture from which she drew inspiration. Living at a time of rapid evolution and growth in Frederick, Helen captured local landmarks like the historic Zentz Mill, the Stone Tavern at Battletown, and the Frederick Academy building before they were demolished in the name of progress.

Helen found willing partners in this work through the Frederick Art Club. Beginning in 1907, the Club developed and cared for a park on West Patrick Street at Reihl's Spring near the site of the residence of Barbara Fritchie along Carroll Creek. Club members paid for the construction of a pavilion and created beautiful gardens in this park, which was dedicated to the memory of Frederick's Civil War heroine.

