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## Spiders in the Attic: Anne Bradshaw Clopton's Cobweb Paintings

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Helton: Spiders in the Attic: Anne Bradshaw Clopton's Cobweb Paintings  
**Spiders in the Attic:**  
**Anne Bradshaw Clopton's Cobweb Paintings**

VENITA SMITH HELTON\*

*"Will you walk into my parlor?" said the Spider to the Fly--  
"Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy;  
The way into my parlor is up a winding stair, And I have  
Many curious things to show you when you're there."*

*"Oh, no, no," said the little Fly, "to ask me is in vain,  
For who goes up your winding stair can ne'er come down again."*

*The Spider turned him round about, and went into his den,  
For well he knew the silly Fly would soon come back again;  
So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner sly,  
And set his table ready, to dine upon the Fly.*

*Alas, alas! How very soon this silly little Fly,  
Hearing his wily, flattering words, came slowly flitting by:  
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew  
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue,  
Thinking only of her crested head- poor foolish thing! At last,  
Up jumped the cunning Spider, and fiercely held her fast;  
He dragged her up his winding stair into his dismal den,  
Within his little parlor- but she ne'er came out again!*

Mary Howitt, "The Spider and the Fly," stanzas 1,2,9, and 11<sup>1</sup>

The spider would have missed his dinner if young Anne Bradshaw had spied his pretty web. Many years ago, a little girl from neighboring Shelbyville, Tennessee, who lived in Huntsville for most of her life, invented a very odd method of painting that the world has not seen before or since. Unafraid of spiders, Anne painted pictures on their "parlors."

Anne was born to Professor Robert Samuel Bradshaw and Sarah Caldwell Bradshaw on July 22, 1878. When the family moved to Fayetteville, where Professor Bradshaw administered Dick White College (which was actually a secondary school), Anne studied Latin, Greek, crafts, drawing and other "lady-like accomplishments," although she said she never received any instruction in painting. This was probably a good thing, as it made it possible for Anne to exercise her creativity outside the rigid boundaries of traditional painting instruction.

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\* I want to take this opportunity to thank James Malvern Clopton, who passed away in 2002, as well as Mrs. Bitsy Studdard Thornton and Mrs. Sarah Huff Fisk for generously sharing their memories of Mrs. Clopton's life and work with me. I would also like to thank Burritt Museum for allowing me to photograph and publish the paintings in the Clopton collection. The only way to truly preserve history is to share it.

Still, her drawing teachers recognized talent when they saw it. When Anne was about thirteen years old, one of her teachers gave her a number of art magazines. Anne found an account of a professor in Germany who painted on spider webs. The problem was that the author did not explain how the man accomplished such a feat.

Anne was intrigued, yet perplexed as she pondered the question of how he could possibly paint on an ordinary spider web. She later revealed that when she read the article, she had no idea that there were over 25,000 varieties of spiders in the world, that each kind spun a different sort of web, and that the web of a German spider might be a little different than the ones she could find under her bed. Indeed, it would be *fifty years* before Anne finally discovered that the spider webs the German used were almost an inch thick and as strong as fish net. The German's painting technique was entirely different from the one Anne was about to invent.

"If some man across the ocean can paint on cobwebs, I can, too," the girl told her father. I intend to start right away."<sup>2</sup> The only problem was that the article had offered no instructions. How could she paint on a spider web's few, tiny strands? "Writers ought to be more accurate," she said.<sup>3</sup>

"There are webs and then there are webs," Professor Bradshaw said. "Have you been up in the attic lately? I saw a great big one up there just last week."<sup>4</sup>

Professor Bradshaw didn't appear to reflect on the notion that a *spider* had spun that web, and that nineteenth-century homemakers such as his wife detested spiders in the attic, no matter what make and model they were. Anne later said, "If my mother had seen that web, she would have taken a broom to it."<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, Anne got to the web before her mother did. She borrowed her little sister's watercolor paints and scrambled upstairs to turn that web into a masterpiece.

Her first brushstroke tore straight through the web. Never a quitter when she had a project in mind, Anne found other webs for her grand experiment. After destroying five that afternoon, she discovered that if she gently touched the brush tip to a single strand, she could leave a dot of paint on it. She pursued her method for over an hour, leaving dot after dot of paint to gradually fill in the holes between the strands. Although a "real" artist might not want to apply the term "stippling" to Anne's technique, this is the closest descriptor of her method. Only when the fragile web began to sag under the weight of the paint did Anne put away her brushes for the night.

When she returned to her makeshift "studio" late the next day, she found that Mr. Spider had spun his cottony web all over her painting. Anne spent two hours repainting the sticky canvas. The next day she returned to the attic to find still more cotton gauze over her masterpiece.

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Anne now faced a dilemma: even if she could manage to complete the picture before the spider returned to his parlor to spin more webs, how could she get it downstairs without tearing it to bits? She tried a variety of “enterprises,”<sup>6</sup> tore up quite a few webs, and then finally cut a frame out of cardboard. She eased the frame under a web she had not yet painted and gently began to lift. The web’s mooring lines broke, the sticky strands adhered to the cardboard, and Anne held a filmy “canvas” stretched over the frame. She could see right through the web, as there was no backing on the cardboard frame. Triumphant, she carried the web downstairs and began painting in the comfort of the kitchen. History does not record what her mother had to say about that spider web or her daughter’s unusual endeavor.

Before long, Anne discovered that the watercolor paints she was using dried out and cracked the spider webs, causing her paintings to disintegrate. Unwilling to give up her new avocation, she collected enough pennies to buy some oil paints. “I spent all my allowance on supplies,” she later recalled in a magazine interview. “I nearly ran my family crazy talking about it, but finally I painted a picture.”<sup>7</sup>

Using bottle caps for palettes and pig’s hair brushes no thicker than a toothpick, Anne tackled another web. However, the heavy oil paint soon stretched and broke the web. She next tried thinning the oils with turpentine to make a watery tint. This time the paint adhered without cracking the web. The problem was that the oils were so heavy in comparison to the web that she had to let the paint dry before proceeding to the next part of the picture; this meant that she could only paint a little each day. By experimenting with different kinds of webs, she discovered that the little brown grass spider spun the best ones of all. Apparently, the strands were closer together and a little bit stronger than other webs. Anne later discussed her painting technique in a short autobiographical sketch, *On Gossamer Threads—The Life and Works of Anne Bradshaw Clopton*.<sup>8</sup>

After two painstaking years, Anne finally completed a picture she deemed worthy to display. It was a landscape of a cemetery viewed through the arch of an old stone bridge. Her mother called the painting *God’s Acre*. Her son, James Malvern “Clop” Clopton, reported that Anne’s mother showed the painting to a schoolteacher friend. He stared hard at the painting, studying it from every angle and holding it up to the window. Finally, the would-be art critic pronounced, “That can’t be a cobweb.” Before Anne’s mother could stop him, he poked his finger straight through the stone bridge. “Well I’ll be John Brown—I guess it was, after all,” he said, then handed Mrs. Bradshaw the tattered painting and hurried away.

Other artists might have taken a broom to the schoolteacher, but Anne controlled her temper. She wasn’t about to let a skeptical academic who couldn’t even draw a chalk man on a sidewalk spoil her entry into the art

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world. She painted people, animals, flowers, buildings, and landscapes. Everybody in town came to see her work, and everybody had an opinion. Some people said she was a fraud, while others dismissed her as just plain crazy. Anne later said that hardly a day went by without a housewife sending word of a “first-rate cobweb at her house,” and would Anne please grab a cardboard square and hurry over and get it. “I knew everybody in town was laughing at me,” she said. “When I look back, I don’t blame them. They thought it was something I’d get over when I met a nice young man.”<sup>9</sup>

At age 15 or 16, Anne graduated from Dick White College and began to teach Latin and Greek. When she wasn’t teaching or painting, she prowled attics, barns, and bushes for spider webs. She found that the eaves of the house provided many artistic “canvases,” as the webs were cleaner and more accessible there.

And then disaster struck. According to her brother James, Anne was stricken with an illness that blinded her for nearly two years. (Mr. Clopton indicated that Anne had probably contracted polio.) During those years Anne lay in darkness, her eyes covered with thick bandages. It was a miracle that she recovered full sight in one eye and partial vision in the other. She immediately resumed painting on spider webs.

Anne recalled that after she had recovered her sight, she gradually improved her painting technique. Her first pictures had encompassed the entire web, but now she left “holes” in clouds and around her subjects to show the web itself.

The painting below, *Big Spring in 1915*, is part of the collection her family donated to Burritt Museum after her death. (This picture was painted in 1938. Although the photo reproduced here is in black and white, Anne painted in full color. Despite the passage of years, the paintings have retained most of their original brightness.)



*Big Spring in 1915*

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Even though the spider webs were clearly visible, Anne's art critics still suspected she was playing a trick; they couldn't resist poking the webs to "prove" they were phony. These "tests" destroyed the paintings. Since even a very small picture took Anne a month to complete, and larger ones anywhere from three to four months, the tests of these doubters sorely tried her patience.

In 1896, Anne was invited to display her cobweb paintings at the World's Fair in Saint Louis. Because Anne was a great admirer of President McKinley, she painted his portrait and showcased it at the fair. When a skeptic poked his pinky right through President McKinley's face, Anne knew she had to take action to protect her paintings.

She devised a method to suspend the fragile webs between thick cardboard frames and double sheets of glass in such a way that the web did not touch the glass on either side. Without this protection, none of her cobweb paintings would have survived. According to her autobiography, "This fact [people poking the web] and the tendency of the web to deteriorate if exposed to the open air made it necessary for the pictures to be placed between glass with thick mats so that the painted surface never touches the glass and then sealed air tight for protection."<sup>10</sup>

Anne also suspended some of her paintings in old watch casings to make lockets for people to wear. She framed another of her paintings, *Golden Rod and Butterflies*, between two glass domes taped together to form a sphere. Unfortunately, Anne could not afford to frame all her paintings, so people continued to poke and prod the delicate portraits at every opportunity. The painting below, *President McKinley*, which is similar to the painting Anne displayed at the World's Fair, was painted in 1902. This is the oldest cobweb painting in the collection at Burritt Museum. Imagine, it's over a hundred years old!



*President McKinley*

Around 1900, Professor Bradshaw became president of the Huntsville Female College. Anne taught classes at the seminary and painted a picture of the building, shown below.



*Huntsville Female College*

In 1906, Anne married Blunt Clopton, a local farmer and businessman. Blunt owned two large farms near the Merrimack Cotton Mill, a grocery store, and a dry goods store. James Clopton described his father as a good, kind man “who never took up any bad habits.” After World War I, Blunt Clopton became an agent for the Metropolitan Insurance Company. James Clopton recalled that although his father had only attended school until the eighth grade, he was very intelligent and became the company’s top salesman.

The family lived on C Street, which was renamed Clopton Street in Anne’s honor after she became famous for her paintings. Despite the neighbors’ prophesies of years before, meeting a “nice boy” failed to stop Anne from painting on cobwebs. Somehow, she found time to sew clothes for all their children.

Anne also taught at Merrimack School, half a mile from her home, riding a bicycle to work every day. Anne was much loved by her students, so much so that even years later many graduates kept in touch with her. A homemade Valentine’s Day card is included in the Clopton Collection at Burritt Museum, drawn by a former student who had gone into the Navy. When Merrimack School was later renamed Joseph J. Bradley School and expanded to include the upper grades, Anne transferred to the high school department to teach arithmetic and Latin.

James Clopton stated that although his mother was busy rearing six children and teaching at Bradley, she started the first Girl Scout troop in <https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol28/iss4/3>

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Alabama. She obtained some World War I surplus Army tents and took the girls on two-week camping trips. This was the first organized camping for girls in the state.

In 1932, the Clopton home burned to the ground. Blunt Clopton rebuilt it as a one-story house that still stands today. Anne sometimes called it “a little half house.” She converted a broom closet into a miniature studio, stacking her completed pictures and spare cobweb “canvases” on its shelves. In the summer and fall she stockpiled enough webs to supply her needs throughout the winter when the spiders were dormant. James Clopton stated that his mother often asked him to climb up in the barn loft to collect cobwebs for her.

In 1938, the president of Hobby Lobby, Dave Elman, heard about the lady who painted on cobwebs. After examining the paintings to see if they were genuine, he brought Anne to Radio City in New York to interview her on the Hobby Lobby program. Anne’s fame was growing. She would return in 1943 as his guest, “this time broadcast over CBS from Columbia Studios in New York.”<sup>11</sup>

Tragedy struck the Cloptons in late 1938. Not long after Anne returned from her first visit to Radio City, her grandson, five-year-old Bobby Kring, the son of their daughter, Mary Caldwell Kring, came to Anne’s house to have his portrait painted. The day after Christmas, Bobby went outside to play by the lily pond in front of the Clopton home. James Clopton recalled that Bobby had a “big Collie dog.” The boy “tried to push the dog into the pond but the dog folded up on itself as dogs will do, and Bobby fell into the cold water.”<sup>12</sup> The shock stopped his breathing and caused him to drown.



*Bobby Kring*

The grief-stricken Cloptons filled in the lily pond. Anne then completed Bobby’s picture. One can imagine the sorrowing grandmother applying thousands of dots of paint to a spider’s web, the paint dropping like tears for the little boy. Anne kept Bobby’s portrait for herself. Years later, Burritt Museum received the treasured portrait from her estate. Although many decades have passed, the little boy in the sailor suit looks out from the cobweb, his eyes as blue as the sea and his cheeks as rosy as the flowers in his grandmother’s garden. It is as though time stood still, captured in the fragile web of a little brown spider.



In 1939, Anne was again invited to the World's Fair, this time sponsored by Dave Elman. At the Hobby Lobby booth, Anne demonstrated her painting technique to amazed crowds.

By this time, James Clopton had entered the U.S. Naval Academy. He sent his mother a photograph of a ship he wanted her to paint for him. She did so, and entitled it *Blue Ship*. Before she could give it to him, curators came from the Smithsonian Museum to study her work. They took *Blue Ship* and one other painting to Washington, D.C. When James got home and asked for his picture, his mother had to tell him it was in a museum. She set to work painting him another *Blue Ship*, which now exists as part of the James Malvern Clopton estate.

Anne later painted another replica of the piece, but it was destroyed enroute to the fair in New York. Burritt Museum has the shattered painting in its collection to illustrate the fragility of the portraits. Imagine the heavy paint weighing down the web and gradually causing it to crack. If dropped, the web shatters like blown glass.

It is interesting that many years later, Anne toured the Smithsonian Institution and discovered that the German professor she had read about in the art magazine had used "big old thick German spider webs about like cotton batting."<sup>13</sup> What a difference from Anne's canvas, the gossamer web of the little brown spider! The German artist could paint on his webs much as he would ordinary canvas, with broad swatches of color and a manly handling of the brush, whereas Anne's technique required her to stipple thousands of tiny dots on a web so fragile that it could break if she breathed on it too hard. Anne Bradshaw Clopton learned that she had invented an entirely different cobweb painting technique, one which no other artist has ever replicated.

Anne's fame was such that during World War II, Universal Picture Corporation sent a crew to Anne's house to make a "Stranger Than Fiction" movie of her gathering and painting webs. Soldiers in army camps and hospitals all over the world viewed the movie, leading to worldwide recognition of Anne Clopton's talent.<sup>14</sup>

Not to let Universal Studios outdo them, Columbia Pictures came to film Anne painting on cobwebs as part of their "People at Work" film series. Additionally, the National Association of Manufacturers came to Huntsville to film Mrs. Clopton as part of its "Industry on Parade" film series. The film now rests in the Archives Department at the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>15</sup>

When representatives from Ripley's *Believe It Or Not!* Museum heard about Anne's paintings, they hurried to Huntsville to obtain several paintings for their collection of "oddities."

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Magazine editors were also keen to interview Anne. An article in *The Southerner* contains a photograph showing her gathering webs while her favorite cat, Honey, watches her. Honey was a favorite subject for Anne to paint. The cat's portrait, painted in 1941, is held by Burritt Museum. According to Anne's autobiography, "the 1940s and 1950s saw numerous newspaper columnists and cartoonists around the country feature Mrs. Clopton's paintings."<sup>16</sup> Her book contains two cartoon portraits most likely drawn by artists other than her.<sup>17</sup>

Besides painting on cobwebs, Anne painted on lamp globes, fashioned jewel boxes from goose eggs, and made doll furniture out of turkey quills. Anne was a charter member of the Culture Club, a group of Huntsville women who met to discuss art, literature, and current events. The group is still in existence today. Anne also served as president of the Madison County Art Association.

In her never-ending thirst for knowledge, Anne took university classes all her life. "The teacher who isn't learning isn't really teaching," she said. "When the time comes that I can't teach better than the year before, I'm going to retire."<sup>18</sup>

By the mid 1940s, Anne had painted more than four hundred pictures. One of her favorites was a portrait of Robert E. Lee's home in Virginia, painted on a cobweb she had plucked from one of the general's very own bushes. Although she was famous, Anne still used her humble little broom closet as an art studio. Her eyesight, weak since her childhood illness, worsened until she was obliged to wear thick glasses and peer through a magnifying glass as she painted each web, one dot at a time.

By the early 1950s, hundreds of Anne's cobweb paintings were in the hands of collectors from around the world. Many traded not money for her paintings, but art objects and curiosities, such as spider brooches and a grain of rice embellished with miniature writing. Anne especially liked a spider someone had painted for her on the head of a pin. She catalogued each piece so she could remember who gave it to her and when she received it.<sup>19</sup>

A Huntsville resident, Bitsy Studdard Thornton, offered additional insight into Anne's personality. "I was only nine-and-a-half years old and hadn't lived in Huntsville very long when I met Mrs. Clopton. I wasn't happy about being here. One day my mother took me over to the Cloptons' house. Mrs. Clopton was heavy and small, not much taller than me, and had snow-white hair. She had a twinkle in her eye. She asked me, 'Do you want to see what I do?' I walked into a room and here were all these paintings and memorabilia from all over the world. I was in fairyland. That first impression will always stick with me."<sup>20</sup>

Mrs. Thornton recalled that Anne Clopton let her help collect cobwebs. “I broke more than anybody in the world,” she said. However, wrapped in Mrs. Clopton’s magical world, the young girl became happier about living in Huntsville. “I always went into that room with the wonderful paintings. She would use a little bitty brush to ‘peck’ little dots. I saw a lot of cobwebs go ‘pssh!’ All of a sudden they’d disintegrate. One moment the web was there and the next it was gone. She just let it go and didn’t get ruffled. She was calm and gentle.”<sup>21</sup>

Although in her 70s, Anne still traveled on a limited basis to show her work. Notes accompanying a portrait of four red roses reveal that Anne showed a similar piece at the 1950 National Pacific Exhibition at Vancouver, Canada. “It was hung upside down,” she wrote.

In spite of her fame, Anne never became a rich artist. Sarah Huff Fisk of Huntsville, one of Mrs. Clopton’s friends, recalled that in the 1950s, Anne’s miniature cobweb paintings framed in old watch casings and worn as locket cost about \$25. Even by that day’s economic standards, \$25 wasn’t much for a month’s painstaking work. On September 14, 1952, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* reported that Anne received \$25 for a 3x5-inch portrait, and \$75 for a 6x8.<sup>22</sup> The same article revealed that she “derived a better income” from painting on glass globes, as she could complete them quickly and received “from \$15 to \$25 for each one, depending on size and design. But she is a bit scornful of this sideline. ‘Anyone can paint on a piece of glass,’” she said.<sup>23</sup>

Anne’s eyesight finally failed her, stealing the tiny paintbrush from her hand and leaving only memories of the industrious spiders’ cobweb canvases. She had painted between 600 and 700 cobweb pictures since climbing into the attic nearly 64 years before.

Anne Bradshaw Clopton died at her home on February 4, 1956. Her ingenuity, artistic skill, and girlish enthusiasm resonate in the rare collection of cobweb paintings housed at Burritt Museum and in the hands of collectors in Huntsville and throughout the world. Because of their age and fragility, the paintings at Burritt Museum are boxed and will never again be put on public display.

Before his death, James Clopton revealed that when the family donated the collection to the museum, it was appraised at \$96,000. At that time, the collection contained many cobweb paintings in lockets and small frames. Mr. Clopton stated that the museum sponsored a “big art show of Mother’s work. They hung the lockets all over the doorjamb. People came in by the hundreds, and by the end of the show, there wasn’t a single locket left—people just put them in their pockets and walked away. They took the small paintings, too—anything small enough to make off with. The museum people should have known it would happen. They should have put the pictures in a display case.”<sup>24</sup>

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While it is sad to think of Anne's beloved paintings being stolen, it is amazing to think that a woman from our town created a painting method that will probably never be seen again. Those of us who admire creative people can imagine Anne crawling around in a dusty old attic, looking for the spider's parlor. We will remember her immortal words: "Anyone can paint on a piece of glass. Now you take cobwebs- well, I have to do something to fill up my spare time!"<sup>25</sup>

### Clopton Collection Held by Burritt Museum

#### Description of contents of paintings from catalog cards dated Feb. 12, 1986:

- *Big Spring in 1915*, painted in 1938. Framing: standing wood frame with cream mat with white paint on bevel edge (has fixed footed base). Tall 8 ¼" x 13 (standing height). Signed lower right "ABC, '38." Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-14.
- *Comic Man in the Moon Laughing at Frogs*, painted in 1940. Framed: 4 ¼" x 6 ¼". Silver curved wood; cream oval mat. Contents- clouds yellow moon with smiling face and six frogs on a log. Signed lower right "ABC." Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-20a and -20b.
- *Christmas Motif,*" painted 1938. Circular painting of three magi and palm tree. Framed: black wood frame- cream mat with circular cut out. Measures: 7 ½" x 7 ½". Signed lower right "ABC, '38." Catalog Card Access # 1986-3a and -3b.
- *Bobby Kring*, painted 1938. Son of Mary Clopton Kring. This painting is a portrait of Mrs. Clopton's grandson who drowned in a pond on the family home while this painting was being done. He was trying to push his dog in the pond- water too cold. Framed in incised silver frame with cream mat. Measures 7 ¾" x 5 ¾". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-15a and -15b.
- *Honey, Mrs. Clopton's Cat*, painted in 1941. Framed in metal frame (gold) with cream mat. Measures: 4 ½" x 3 ½". Signed upper right corner "ABC '41." Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-21a and -21b.
- *Spider on a Spider Web*, painted 1948. Contents: painting of a brown spider on spider web with garden flowers (Black-eyed Susans) in foreground. Signed "ABC '48." Medium: oil. Inlaid wood frame, cream mat. Dimension 8 ¾" x 6 ½". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-8a and -8b.

- *Scene of Big Spring Masonry Pump House Built 1860*, painted in 1949. Gold tone cutwork carved frame, crème mat. Dimensions 11"x9". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-5a – 5b.
- *Picture of Mrs. Clopton's Home*, painted 1947. Framed in gold wooden frame- cream mat. Measures: 9 7/8"x 6". Originally inventoried in Clopton Collection as #28 of her paintings. Signed: Lower left, "ABC." Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-1a and -1b.
- *World's Fair 1939*, painted while at the Fair. 7 1/2"x 5 3/4". Originally catalogued as #7 of her paintings. Framed in silver tone wood frame, carved black embossed mat. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-2.
- *Lotus in Fish Pond*, painted 1938. A small garden scene painted from pond in front yard, which was later, filled in. Medium: oil paints on cobweb. Measures 6"x10". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-4a and – 4b.
- *Snow Scene*, painted 1938. Landscape snow scene of houses, stream, and bridge. Framed: black wood with cream mat 10 1/4"x6". Medium: oil on cobweb. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-13a and –13b.
- *Huntsville Seminary Eustis and Randolph Streets*, painted 1940. Framed: black wood frame- cream mat. 6 7/8"x7 5/8". Medium: oil paint on cobweb. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-7a and –7b.
- *Four Red Roses*, painted 1953. Painting of "Four Red Roses" was copied from the original *Four Red Roses* painted in 1938. Shown at 1950 National Pacific Exhibition at Vancouver, CA. Signed "ABC, '53." Note: It was hung upside down at the exhibition. Medium: oil. Dimension: 7 3/4" x 5 3/4". Originally catalogued as #12 of Clopton's paintings. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-12 a-c.
- *Clay-Colored Sparrow* with dogwood branch. Catalogued as #24 of Clopton's paintings. Medium: oil. Dimensions: 5 3/4"x7 1/2". Wood rectangular frame, inner black, cream mat, double frame, varnished. Double wood frame, varnished. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-19 a-c.
- Untitled bust portrait of woman in black Victorian dress with embroidered or lace flowers on yoke, painted 1940. "Gibson Girl" hairstyle. Head of woman tilted. Medium: oil. Dimension: 5"x 7". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-16a and –16b.

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- *Blue Ship*, painted 1940. Destroyed in transportation to exhibition in New York in the 1960s—a replica of the one donated to the Smithsonian Institution. Framed in black wood frame, cream mat. Measures 7  $\frac{3}{4}$ "x5  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Medium: oil on cobweb. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-16a and -16b.
- *President William McKinley*, three-quarter bust view, signed lower right corner "ABC, 1902." Antiqued, carved square frame. Circular cut-out cream mat. Medium: oil. Dimension: 8  $\frac{3}{4}$ "x 8  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2a and -2b.
- *Huntsville Female College Randolph and Clinton Streets*, painted 1953. Measures 8"x 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Framed: 2 black wood frames, cream mat with "Frenchline" edge. Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-6 a-c.
- *Golden Rod and Butterflies*, painted 1948. Framed between two domes of glass making a small sphere—the two domes are sealed with dogtooth cut tape. Web matted with foil paper. Signed lower right "ABC, 1948." Painted on both sides of the web so that the painting could be seen on all sides. Measures 4" diameter by  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick. (Note to reader: The thickness measurement refers to the edges where the half-domes are joined.) Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-18.
- *Frog and Water Lilies*, painted 1948. Framed in a plastic domed paintbrush box. Matted with foil paper and suspended over a silver foil field. Measures 9  $\frac{1}{2}$ "x 2  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Catalog Card Access # 1986-2-17 a-c.

### Memorabilia and Awards

The following memorabilia and awards were part of the Clopton collection catalogued and donated to Burritt Museum.

### Memorabilia

These memorabilia were created and presented to Mrs. Clopton either in exchange for cobweb paintings, or as gifts by admirers.

- *Rice Writing*, by William J. Nordvedt. Two cards with a grain of rice attached. Upon the rice is written, "Mrs. James Blunt Clopton Paints Pictures on Cobwebs Huntsville, Alabama." (Note: catalog card states, "See article about Nordvedt in Clopton Papers.") Access # 1986-2-55.

- *V-Mail Valentine*, from Paul Reavis, a sailor in the Pacific fleet during WWII, sent January 22, 1943 from the Solomon Islands to Mrs. J.B. Clopton. Framed in wooden frame- painted white with glass. Measures 4  $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Originally item 88 in Clopton inventory. (Note: This Valentine's card came from Anne Clopton's former student.)
- *Miniature Photograph of Joseph H. Gray*, within the dot after the H in his signature. Framed in small metal frame with glass 2  $\frac{1}{2}$ "x 3  $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Unframed card with Joseph H. Gray's signature which bears a photo of him within the period of the H. 3  $\frac{1}{4}$ "x 1  $\frac{5}{8}$ ". Gray was a collector of miniatures in Chicago, IL during the 1950s.
- Photograph of American Indian. Access # 1986-2-108.
- *Mrs. Clopton's Spider jewelry*. Access \* 1986-2-27 a-h.  
Set, two 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ " blue costume spider pins with 6  $\frac{1}{4}$ " gold link chain.  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$ " silver costume spider pin with green (olive) rectangle design on top dorsal side.  
3" black metal costume spider pin with polished rock body.  
2  $\frac{1}{4}$ " orange oval plastic spider pin with spider resting on oval black center, rhinestone and pink gems.  
1  $\frac{1}{2}$ " spider pin metal with unknown round black stone.  
1  $\frac{3}{4}$ " spider and spider web pin, gold tone costume web with rhinestone, red and light blue gems with artificial pears and red bumblebee with spring resting atop spider.

### *Awards*

- Orange and blue  $\frac{1}{2}$ " button (pin) reading: "New York World's Fair. I was there. 1939." Access #1986-2-106 a.
- Blue Ribbon: "Special Award." White button. 1946 Hobby Lobby Show. Access #1986-2-106 b.
- Blue Honorable Mention: 10<sup>th</sup> Annual American Hobby Show, Hearn, 1947. Ribbon. Access #1986-2-106 c.
- Blue Ribbon: "First Premium," Madison County Fair, Huntsville, AL (AL Great Seal). Access #1986-2-106 d.
- Exhibited by Invitation: National Hobby Exposition, July 8-July 16, Toronto, Ontario, CA 1949. Access #1986-2-106 e.

- <sup>1</sup> Mary Howitt, "The Spider and the Fly," stanzas 1,2,9, and 11.
- <sup>2</sup> Recollection of Anne Bradshaw Clopton's son, James Malvern Clopton, February 1998. "Clop" passed away in 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> "Cobweb Paintings," *Scenic South*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (April 1954).
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Recollection of James Malvern Clopton, February 1998.
- <sup>7</sup> Joyce L. Jones, "The Picture on the Web," *The Southerner*, (May 1949), pp. 46-64.
- <sup>8</sup> Clopton, Anne Bradshaw. *On Gossamer Threads, The Life and Works of Anne Bradshaw Clopton* (Huntsville, AL: Burritt Museum, reprint 1986).
- <sup>9</sup> Recollection of James Malvern Clopton, April 1998.
- <sup>10</sup> Clopton, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 24.
- <sup>12</sup> Recollection of James Malvern Clopton, April 1998.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Clopton , pp.22-23.
- <sup>15</sup> Reel number 221. Industry on Parade Film Collection, National Museum of American History Archives Center. The film has not been transferred to video because of the expense (several hundred dollars, according to Reference Specialist Susan Strange). The films in this collection were made by the National Association of Manufacturers between 1950-1960, comprising 428 reels of 16mm black and white composite optical track motion picture film prints, and were then donated to the museum in 1974. The collection covers thousands of topics, providing a comprehensive portrait of American business and manufacturing during the 1950s. The films portray work processes, community life, recreation, and reveal through narration the ideology of American business during this era. The films are available for research viewing at the Archives Center.
- <sup>16</sup> Clopton, p. 24.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 23.
- <sup>18</sup> Anne Clopton retired at age 63, after twenty-two years of teaching. Her children shared her love of helping others to learn. According to James Malvern Clopton, his elder brother, Robert, became a college professor and taught at the University of Hawaii. The oldest daughter, Mary (Bobby Kring's mother), rode a horse to Kentucky and taught the mountain women how to can vegetables. James Clopton helped found a Campus Crusades Ministry and remained active in the organization until shortly before his death.
- <sup>19</sup> Recollection of James Malvern Clopton, March 1998.



<sup>20</sup> Recollection of Betsy Studdard Thornton, October 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> McCormick, John. "Pictures on Cobwebs." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Sept. 14, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Recollection of James Malvern Clopton, March 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Also partially quoted in Jones, "The Picture on the Web."