



**Noyes**  
Museum of Art  
STOCKTON UNIVERSITY

Education Guide: Overview

March 13 – September 11, 2020

## ***Estell Empire: Ships, Settlements, Suffrage, and Society***

- **Opening Reception: *Third Thursday*,  
Date TBD, 5:00 – 7:00 pm**
- **“Lunch & Learn:” Date TBD**
- **Public Tour & Reception: Date TBD**



Thomas Gordon, *A Map of the State of New Jersey with Part of the Adjoining States*, Engraved by H. S. Tanner, E. B. Dawson and W. Allen (Trenton: Thomas Gordon; Philadelphia: H. S. Tanner, 1828).

**OVERVIEW:** *Estell Empire* tells the fascinating story of the Estell family of New Jersey—a story of ships, settlements, suffrage, and society; from their arrival in the English colonies of the New World in the 1600s, to New Jersey’s first female mayor—Rebecca Estell Bourgeois. The Estells’ commercial ventures evolved over time in a succession of industries using the natural resources of their vast estate: from harvesting and milling lumber, making charcoal and pitch, to glassmaking and establishing immigrant farming settlements, among other endeavors. Many pieces on exhibit were owned by the family, including portraits, fine china, and silverware, as well as artifacts such as a ledger book and handwritten letters.

**ESTELL FAMILY:** The family name Estell derived, by some accounts, from the original French *d’Esail* going back to the eleventh century, during the time period of William the Conqueror’s rise to power in England. They were Huguenots, or French Calvinist Protestants, who fled from France to the Netherlands, then to England, and eventually America to escape persecution by the Roman Catholics. Daniel Estell left England for North America in 1671 and arrived in New Jersey, acquiring 271 acres in what is now Monmouth County. The land was sold in 1687 by his son John Estell who purchased properties in South Jersey estimated to have ranged up to 20,000 acres, covering much of what is now Estell Manor and Dorothy. Possibly the most celebrated of the family line was Captain Joseph Estell, who served during the Revolutionary War. In the 1800s, Daniel E. Estell and his half-brother John Estell were the driving forces behind industry in “Estellville.” In the early 1900s, Rebecca Estell Bourgeois, the last in this branch of the family, was a political force in the state of New Jersey.

**EARLY INDUSTRIES: SHIPBUILDING AND TIMBER** - Timber, because of its multiple uses, was a commodity crucial to the early success of Estellville. Thousands of acres of trees on Estell land made these resources abundant and readily available for exploitation and use in the industries of this time period.

**SHIPS:** Along with the commercial successes of shipping came risk and misfortune. In 1831, the schooner BENJAMIN E. VALENTINE was caught in a January nor'easter and, rather than sailing north to its destination in New York, was driven south to Norfolk, Virginia. By the time it limped into port, the ship and its cargo had sustained major damage. In 1840, the WM. GRANGER, another Estell-owned ship, sank with all hands aboard.

**SETTLEMENTS: BURBRIDGE COLONY**—Spanning the years 1882 to 1883, the Burbridge Colony of Estellville remains a relatively forgotten and short-lived piece of local history. Approximately twenty Jewish families from the Alliance Colony of the Vineland area became the first to settle in Burbridge. Despite the resources that were provided, life in the settlement was extremely difficult. Many of the refugees could not afford to live there and moved to the cities for work. By December of 1883, Burbridge Colony was nearly deserted.

**ESTELLE COLONY**—In 1894, real estate agent and developer Daniel L. Risley bought two large tracts of land from the Estells, developing the land, sectioning it into lots, and enticing hundreds of families, mostly immigrants, to purchase property. In 1901, Risley failed to meet the terms of the mortgages, and one of the largest property lawsuits ever held in Atlantic County resulted, with one thousand defendants named against him. In 1903, one of the largest property foreclosure sales in Atlantic County history was held, and the Estell-Bourgeois family proceeded to buy back all of the land that Risley had lost.

**SUFFRAGE: REBECCA ESTELL BOURGEOIS (1887–1933)**—Rebecca was a schoolteacher in South Jersey. She was briefly married to James Meriwether Winston, although they quickly divorced. An accomplished politician, she served on many committees as well as on the Township Board of Education; she was the first woman foreman on an Atlantic County Grand Jury. She drew the boundaries for Estell Manor City and succeeded in making it a municipality, becoming its mayor in 1925, the first female mayor in New Jersey. Estell Manor was New Jersey's largest city until the incorporation of Vineland in 1952. At the time of her death in 1933, a news article named her the “first lady of Atlantic County Democracy.”

**SOCIETY: GEORGE WASHINGTON CONARROE (1802–1882)** - Conarroe (pronounced KUH-NAIR-oh) worked as a cabinetmaker in Salem, NJ, learning the art of painting signs and furniture, and transferred his skills to portraiture. Conarroe probably met his future wife, Charlotte Biddle West, while painting portraits at her family home south of Mays Landing. Her brother George and sister Maria (the first wife of Daniel E. Estell) are portrayed in the paintings on exhibit. Collections of his work are housed at the Salem County (NJ) Historical Society and the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent (PA).

**SMITH SISTER LETTERS** - The Smith family, Rebecca Smith Estell (second wife of Daniel E. Estell), younger sisters Alice and Anna, and brother Daniel, appear to have been affectionate, remaining in touch by mail when apart. These letters provide us with a more intimate view of life in the mid-1800s in South Jersey.

**THANK YOU to our partners for making this exhibition possible:**

Atlantic County Historical Society, Atlantic County Park at Estell Manor, Atlantic County Veterans Museum, Estell Manor Historical Preservation Commission, Estell Manor Historical Society, Hamilton Historical Society, Friends of the Park, Inc., South Jersey Culture & History Center, South Jersey Collections in the Bjork Library at Stockton University, and Weymouth Township Museum

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