



**WOMEN OF ESTEY ORGAN COMPANY:  
FAMILY AND EMPLOYEES**

**Compiled by Valerie Abrahamsen, ThD**

**Estey Day, September 2014**

**Celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Jacob Estey**

## Desdemona (Wood) Estey

Desdemona was born September 20, 1810, one of several children of David Wood, then of Newfane, Vermont. The family moved to Brattleboro in her infancy, and she lived there almost her whole life. She married Deacon Jacob Estey in 1837 at her father's house near the passenger station. Jacob and Desdemona had two children, Abbie/Abby and Julius J. According to her obituary, her life "was a simple and quiet one, steadfastly devoted to her husband and children. She was, however, a woman of large intelligence, thoroughly informed on all the affairs of the day and wide a constant reader on subjects which attracted her interest. Her knowledge of the Bible was remarkable... In church history and theology she was equally well grounded and the members of the clergy were rare who could equal her incisive and convincing argument or in statement of church doctrine. She had been for 51 years a member of the Baptist church, her conversion taking place during the great religious awakening of 1831, and her membership being for a time with the Congregational church." Jacob died on April 15, 1890, and she followed on June 8, 1891, at her home on Canal Street.

Source: *Vermont Phoenix*, June 12, 1891

## Emily (Hall) Estey

Emily was the daughter of Judge William and Luna (Fuller) Hall of Rutland, Vermont, and born on February 26, 1819, one of 10 children, all of whom predeceased her. She attended the Rutland schools and Castleton seminary. She married (probably on May 30, 1844) James F. Estey, then of Worcester, Massachusetts, where they lived for 12 years. In 1863, they moved to Brattleboro, where she lived until his death in 1885. He was a brother of Jacob Estey and worked for a time with him in the organ business; James then worked for a number of years for Estey and Frost, a flour and grain business. Emily and James had two children, a daughter Alice who died in infancy in 1845 and a stepson, James, who died at age 20 in Newburn, North Carolina, of hardships and exposure in the Civil War. They also adopted a daughter, Annie. Emily lived with Annie and her husband, Frank Amidon, in Wilton and Hinsdale, New Hampshire, in the last years of her life; Emily died at the Hinsdale home on January 31, 1918, at the age of 98. While living in Hinsdale, she regularly attended the Universalist Church, including its Sunday school and missionary society. In November 1912, at age 93, she and three other Hinsdale women in their 80s and 90s were featured in an article at the time. Their combined ages came to 355 years.

*Sources:* February 1918 obituary and "Hinsdale's Quartette of 'Girls,'" 1912 (*Brattleboro Reformer?*)

## **Florence Carpenter (Gray) Estey**

Considered “Brattleboro’s most respected, most admired and most loved woman,” Florence Estey was the widow of Gen. Julius J. Estey. She was born in Cambridge, New York, August 25, 1848, to Dr. Henry C. Gray and Jennett (Bullions) Gray. She married Julius J. Estey on October 29, 1867. Together, they had three children, all of whom predeceased her: Jacob Gray (died May 20, 1930, age 58), Julius Harry (died February 2, 1920, age 45) and Guy Carpenter (died November 18, 1897, age 16).

Florence lived most of her life at Florence Terrace, between Green and Elliot Streets. Her son Gray lived with her after Julius’ death (March 7, 1902) until his own.

Florence was very active in local welfare organizations and outspoken in her beliefs. Early in her life, she was an officer of the Village Improvement Society and the Women’s Industrial and Educational Union. She was a charter member of Brattleboro chapter, Daughters of the Revolution, organized October 4, 1893, and its first treasurer. She served as



Florence (Gray) Estey. Compliments of  
the Brattleboro Historical Society

a member of the credentials committee of the National DAR Society for more than 20 years and was also on the reception and house committees for the same length of time. She gave substantial financial support to the DAR and contributed to the construction funds of the Constitution and Continental Halls in Washington, DC, where she attended the dedication ceremonies of both buildings. She was vice chair of the northern division of Real Daughters, which looked after the interests of the “few real daughters of Revolutionary soldiers.”

Other organizations in which she was involved included the Brattleboro Mutual Aid Association; Students Aid Society of Northfield Seminary (treasurer); Colonial Dames of America; the Vermont Society of Colonial Dames; and the Mary Washington association. She was president of the Brattleboro branch of the American Red Cross during World War I as well as president of the visiting committee at the Home for the Aged. Instrumental in the formation of the Woman's Auxiliary to Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, she served as its president when it was organized on March 8, 1923. She also created many needlework pieces for the hospital linens and raised funds for the Dunham wing.

Florence died of pneumonia at age 84 on January 28, 1933, at the home of her niece, Florence Cull, in Cambridge, New York. She is buried in the Estey family lot in Prospect Hill cemetery, Brattleboro.

Source: Obituary, February 3, 1933, *Brattleboro Reformer*

## Abby Emily (Estey) Fuller

Abby Emily, the first child of Jacob and Desdemona Estey and the older sister of Julius Jacob Estey, was born September 21, 1842. She attended Brattleboro schools, including the old seminary in West Brattleboro. She married Levi Knight Fuller on May 8, 1865. At this time, Levi was a machinist and mechanical engineer with the Estey Organ Company; later he became Vice President, a position he held for 30 years. He was also lieutenant governor of Vermont (elected in 1886) and governor (elected in 1892). In 1874, he founded the Fuller battery of Brattleboro, a former unit in the Vermont National Guard. He died October 10, 1896.

Levi and Abby traveled many times to Europe on business which influenced her later writing, “a world-mindedness and a sympathetic and practical participation in the betterment of conditions, not only in her own town and state but wherever need presented itself” (from her obituary, quoting Clara E. Powell, Foreword to the 1928 “Addresses” of Abby Fuller). Abby was first a member of First Baptist Church in Brattleboro but

later transferred to the West Brattleboro Baptist Church, to which she later bequeathed \$15,000 for maintenance and support. Both Governor Fuller



Abby (Estey) Fuller. From the article "Vermont Women of the Present" by C.S. Forbes. Published in the December, 1901, issue of *The Vermonter* magazine (Volume 7, Number 5).

and General Julius Estey, Abby's brother, were prominent in local and state activities of the Baptist denomination and leaders at First Baptist Church.

Abby gave memorial windows to both churches in memory of her



husband. When she died at age 86 on March 31, 1929, the Estey Organ Company's plant was closed for the afternoon; some of the employees attended her funeral service, which was held at her home, Pine Heights, and was officiated by the ministers of both Baptist churches.

Abby's will, probated shortly after her death, indicates the organizations that benefited from her legacy: the Brattleboro Home for the Aged and Disabled, Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina (which also received her religious books), Norwich University (which also received all her scientific books, those relating to the life of Napoleon, and military books related to the Civil War), Vermont Academy in Saxtons River, and the Vermont Baptist State Convention. Anna Maud (Essex) Hooker, whom Abby Fuller took into her home as a young girl until her marriage to James Hooker, was given Pine Heights, its contents and a trust fund for the home's maintenance. (Anna was the daughter of the London representative of the Estey Organ Company when she came to live with the Fullers.)

“Abby Fuller was to become as politically active, in her own way, as her husband. In a 1928 compilation of her addresses, she speaks of the

encroaching Civil War: 'Brattleboro, at the beginning of the war, had business interests in the South. Ira Miller's carriages and wagons were sold to Southern planters on account of their thorough workmanship and durability. Our Water Cures were patronized largely by people of Southern wealth. They brought some of their slaves with them; gay-turbaned black nurses were a common sight on our streets in my childhood. The Zyragars, the Eustaces, the Buckners from Louisiana, the Stoddards from Savannah, and many from Charleston, South Carolina, summered here. They worshipped with us in our churches on the Sabbath; they loved our hills and streams; they helped to keep the beautiful gardener's path in order, and some stayed late in the autumn to see the reds and yellows of our maples that shaded our streets. But after the war came, the Water Cures felt the loss of Southern patronage.'"

Sources: Obituary, *Brattleboro Reformer*, March 1929;  
Dennis G. Waring, *Manufacturing the muse:  
Estey organs and consumer culture in Victorian America*  
(Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002);  
Mrs. Levi K. Fuller 1928, address no. II, "Some Reminiscences of Brattleboro  
during the Civil War;"  
FamilySearch™ International Genealogical Index, 12/28/2004.

## Carrie L. Smith – Long-time Employee

Carrie L. Smith was born in Jericho, Vermont, on April 16, 1854, the daughter of the Rev. Rufus Smith and Mary E. (Bixby) Smith. She came to work at Estey Organ Company in June 1872 and stayed for 66 years, working as a reed tuner. In the files of the Brattleboro Historical Society is Carrie's 1882 ledger of hours worked. The ledger, which dates from June 1882 to January 1884, provides information about her work. According to organ aficionado Ed Boadway, the ledger shows that Carrie was "stationed on the third floor of Shop 6." The "hours at the tuning 'jack' are carefully listed, with particular mention of time spent on [the] little 2' Wald Flute reeds. She also mentions files used, with dates that seem to indicate when they arrived, new."



There were apparently several highlights in Carrie's career, including business with Henry Ford. He and his assistant must not have met her in person, however, because the thank-you letter of March 7, 1916, was addressed to "CL Smith, Esq" and "Mr Smith"! E.G. Liebold, Secretary to Henry Ford, enclosed \$6 "as a token of appreciation for the extra effort you extended in connection with the building of [the] splendid organ recently installed in [Ford's] home. Each time when it pours forth its wonderful music, his thoughts revert to those whose skill is embodied therein and whose labor has made this possible."

Another letter, this one from President J.P. Estey and also including a check, was dated June 29, 1937, and congratulated Carrie on reaching the 65<sup>th</sup> year of her employment. "[W]e are exceedingly proud to have one in our employ who has been with us such a long time." He states that her "work has always been most satisfactory, and you have been faithful to a fault."

Because of her longevity at the company, Carrie's story even appeared in the *New York Times*! The article noted that she had just begun her 66<sup>th</sup> year of uninterrupted employment at Estey. Her fellow employees "staged an informal celebration in the room where she works. Old-time tunes were played on a reed organ by August Gunzinger, another long-time employee." The article noted that Carrie filed reeds in the same building that she started in, when company founder Jacob was President.

In her personal life, Carrie was also renowned for being one of the oldest members of First Baptist Church in Brattleboro, having joined by letter in 1872. At one time she had taught in the Bible school and was a long-time member of the Woman's club. Carrie appeared on the "Four-Score List" for Brattleboro, dated April 16, 1934. At age 80, she was joined on the list by other Brattleboro seniors in their 80s and 90s.

Carrie died in September 1943 at 89 years of age, after having been ill for about a week. She had resided at 24 Oak Street for decades and had worked for four generations of the Estey family. She was

survived by one brother, Will B. Smith of Brattleboro, a nephew, Holland L. Smith of Burlington, and Lena Vincent Smith of Los Angeles, who lived in the Smith family for many years. Carrie's sister, Stella E. Smith, had died in May 1932.

Sources: Smith Family File at Brattleboro Historical Society; email from Ed Boadway to John Carnahan, June 15, 2009; letter to Carrie Smith from E.G. Liebold, Secretary to Henry Ford, March 7, 1916; "Four-Score List" for Brattleboro, April 16, 1934; letter to Carrie Smith from J.P. Estey, June 29, 1937; *NY Times* article, July 11, 1937; obituary, Oct. 1, 1943.

## **Abbie (Wells) Whitney – Long-time Employee**

Born in Ludlow, Vermont, on April 28, 1860, Abbie Wells became the wife of Leland S. Whitney on June 5, 1889. He died shortly thereafter, in January 1890. Abbie worked at the Brattleboro Retreat when she first moved to Brattleboro then was employed for over 50 years at the Estey plant, finishing work there around August 1932. She lived for many years in the Foster home at 2 Organ Street in Brattleboro. She died at the age of 72 on January 21, 1933, and is buried in Newfane. She left a brother, Herbert M. Wells, of Newfane, a nephew, LeGrand Wells of Watervliet, New York, four grand-nephews and two grand-nieces.

Source: Obituary, January 29, 1933



Ida Worden (in white coat); Grace Wisell (5<sup>th</sup> person from right)  
Photo thanks to [www.esteyorgan.com/employees.html](http://www.esteyorgan.com/employees.html)

## **Grace A. Wisell and Ida Bernice Worden**

Two other long-time Estey employees were Grace A. Wisell and Ida Bernice Worden, shown in the above photo.

Grace was born in Whitingham, Vermont, on July 26, 1906, daughter of George Cross and Agnes Tinker. Her husband was David Wisell, who predeceased her. An assembly worker at Estey Organ Company, she lived



on Route 9 in West Chesterfield, New Hampshire. She died in August 1995 at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital of Alzheimer's disease, from which she had suffered for five years.

Unfortunately, not much is known about Ida Bernice Worden. She apparently never married and probably worked at Estey for most of her adult life. She died in Rural, Colorado, at the age of 63 and was buried at Meetinghouse Hill in Brattleboro on October 13, 1968.

Sources: <http://www.americanancestors.org/PageDetail.aspx?recordId=237621338>, death certificate, accessed 8/26/14; burials book 1967-68, p. 344

## Other Women Workers at Estey

Estey Organ Company employed a number of women over the years.

We honor their memories and dedication to the company here:

A. Anita Atamaniuk. Born Anita Anna Weber; married Michael

Nicholas Atamaniuk May 8, 1948. Their son Michael Daniel

was born March 9, 1956. The possible dates at which she

worked at Estey were 1946-1956. (Marriage book January-June

1948, p. 65; births book 1956, p. 82.)

Hazel C. Barnard (October 21, 1896-February 1981)

Nellie Blanchard (February 20, 1874-November 1971)

Mabel Brockington (June 8, 1898-December 1975)

Helen M. Crown

Elsie D. Gaul (May 12, 1923-May 18, 1997)

Myrtle A. Gunzinger (August 1, 1890-October 1972)

Mary Harris

Emma C. Johnson

Doris V. Magnuson

Alice B. Manning. Listed in 1924 Brattleboro directory:

“sten[ographer] EO Co, b[oards] 32 Canal”

Ellen B. Stiff. Louis C. Stiff listed in 1924 Brattleboro directory:

“emp EO Co, h[ouse] 10 Cedar”

Martha L. Weeks

Rosamund Trask Whitworth. She married Norman Whitworth, a

sheet metal worker of Brattleboro on August 19, 1950. They

had three children: Kenneth (born 1953), Keith (1955), and

Kevin (1958). At the time of her marriage, she was an office

worker; her possible dates of employment at Estey were 1948-

1953.

Hannah O. Wilson (July 9, 1894-June 1989)



Estey veteran crafts workers with more than 40 years of service. Courtesy of the Brattleboro Historical Society.