



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

JOSEPHINE CHAMBERLAIN ELLIS (1842-1913)

Natural Bridge, Virginia

Oil on canvas

24 x 18 inches

Signed and dated 1884, lower right

Josephine Ellis was born in 1842 in Michigan to Harvey and Juliette Chamberlain, both of whom were originally from New York. As a wealthy planter, Chamberlain relocated his family around the country quite frequently. By 1850, the family had moved to Louisiana, and they later moved on to Mississippi. It was here that Josephine met and married Ezekiel John Ellis (known as “E. John”) in 1868.

E. John was a lawyer and former Confederate soldier. By 1880, E. John and Josephine had three children (Lillian (“Lillie”)-12, Thomas-10, and Harvey-4) and were living in New Orleans. Josephine kept the home and took care of the children while E. John built a career in politics. Throughout the 1880s, E. John was elected to the House of Representatives several times, which took the family to Washington, D.C., where Josephine became a prominent socialite among the country’s political elite. It is possible that Josephine took art lessons during this time, as this was a fairly common practice among the wives of congresswomen.

Indeed, Josephine’s painting, *Natural Bridge*, was created during this period when the family lived in Washington, D.C. Lillian (who would eventually become Mrs. John L. Emerson) attended Miss Baldwin’s School (what would later become Mary Baldwin University) in Staunton, Virginia. Natural Bridge, a popular Victorian era tourist destination, is located about 45 miles south of the school, and it is likely that Josephine visited this famous local landmark while visiting her daughter. Natural Bridge is situated on land that was once owned by Thomas Jefferson, who considered it one of the greatest natural wonders in America. Situated within a gorge carved from the surrounding mountainous limestone terrain of Cedar Creek (a tributary of the James River), the bridge and its surroundings are now managed by the Commonwealth of Virginia as Natural Bridge State Park.

When E. John died in Washington, D.C. on April 25, 1889, his obituary identified his surviving wife as a “lady of rare accomplishment” – a statement likely referring to her artistic achievement. After the death of her husband, Josephine headed back to New Orleans where she founded and became president of the New Orleans Indian Association – an organization that aided the assimilation of Native Americans, which occupied her attention for the remainder of her life.

Josephine died at her son Harvey’s home in Covington, Louisiana in 1913.