

# Theodore Hildreth Eaton

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Interviews with colleagues and neighbors of Theodore Hildreth Eaton, made sixteen years after he left Ithaca in 1944, at the time of his retirement, give us a reasonable picture of the man and of his work. Without specific reference to authorship, here is the way he is remembered by most of his friends who had a decade and a half to form a seasoned judgment of one with whom they had worked, lived, and associated.

He was a kind neighbor who “did little neighboring.” He was an affectionate father and devoted husband in a family whose many interests kept them busily concerned with the better things of life. He was the kind of man who advised a younger associate not to get involved in politics, to avoid writing to the papers no matter how disturbing a situation might be. In spite of this, in a major emergency he would write in longhand a marvelously understanding letter of sympathy while others did nothing. He was the kind of man who in a deliberative group would calmly tamp the tobacco in his pipe, adjust his ever-present green eyeshade, and with excellent accuracy and effectiveness hit the nail he chose to hit squarely on the head. As is often the case in groups concerned with controversy, there were those who sometimes felt that he hit the wrong nail, but it is doubtful if anyone ever thought that Professor Eaton was not expressing his honest and respected judgment. He could criticize without rancor and without raising resentments. He loved to back a cause but insisted that both sides of a case be presented even at the risk of losing needed support.

These evaluations given after his death may explain in part why at 31 his career in politics closed in one year after he had been sent as a high school teacher to represent Gilmanton, New Hampshire, as a delegate to the Republican State Convention.

Professor Eaton’s career was a varied one. Yet each experience seemed to leave its mark on his major life activity. Graduating from Harvard in 1900 with an A.B. degree, he went to Massachusetts Agricultural College for a year and in 1901 took his M.A. degree there. With this part of his life’s pattern set he went into farming. From 1901 to 1906 he was a farmer. From 1906 to 1910 he was a high school teacher at Gilmanton, New Hampshire, where he may have formed some important conclusions relative to the vocational possibilities of politics. In 1912-1913 he was an instructor in agriculture at Cornell University and the following year an instructor in agricultural education at the Central State Teachers College at Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. Following this he served as instructor in education at Columbia University. During the period from 1916 to 1920 he further enriched his experience and

training for his life's work. In that time he served as a high school supervisor of agriculture and as Professor and Dean of Teacher Training at the Connecticut Agricultural College. During that same period he received his Ph.D. degree in education at Columbia University.

Professor Eaton returned to Cornell in 1920. This time he came as Professor in Rural Education with responsibility in the field of the philosophy of education. He served there with distinction and did much to lay the groundwork for the program for which the University now grants a doctorate in education.

During his professional career Professor Eaton wrote and published over sixty books and papers in the field of education. Of these, five significant books were *Agricultural Education*, 1916; *Vocational Education in Agricultural Occupations*, 1923; *Education and Vocation*, 1926; *College Teaching*, 1932; and *An Approach to the Philosophy of Education*, 1938.

Dr. Eaton was not a joiner in the looser sense of the word, but he was a member of the major significant professional honorary groups of his profession. He was a member of Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Delta Kappa, the National Society for the Study of Education, and the American Association of University Professors. Born in Missouri he lived during his lifetime in over a dozen states and traveled in most of them. He was known for his strong scholarly interests. Nevertheless he was decidedly human.

Professor Eaton loved to fish and, for a while at least, returned many of the fish he caught to the water after putting his own mark on the fish by removing certain scales from the side of the body. It was most fitting that he spent a major portion of his retired life near good fishing water in Damariscotta, Maine. He left his mark on many of the fishes of those waters by removing scales. More important he had left his mark on thousands of students and associates by adding something to their philosophy of education. Probably most important in his judgment would be the fact that his two children Julia and Theodore, his survivors, are continuing to serve collegiate education on the staffs of institutions of higher learning in Maine and in Kansas. Incidentally his son made some significant studies of the life habits of earthworms, of some importance in bringing men and fishes together.

*Harley E. Howe, Clyde B. Moore, E. Laurence Palmer*