

## Gen. A. K. Eaton

ISSN 0003-4827

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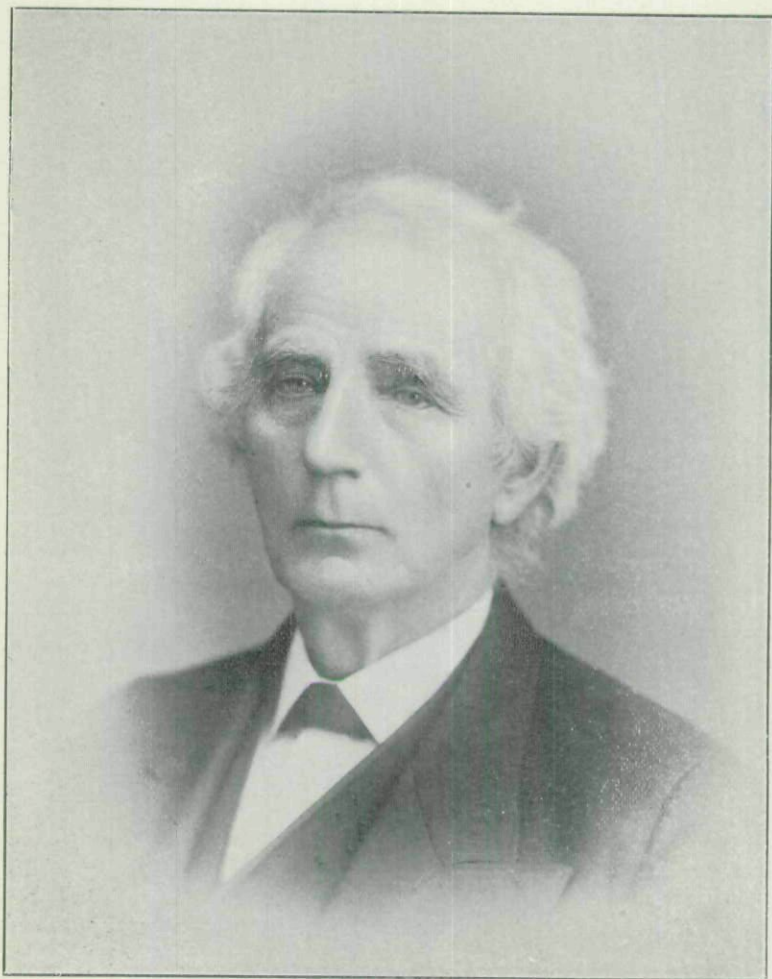
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### Recommended Citation

"Gen. A. K. Eaton." *The Annals of Iowa* 5 (1901), 33-37.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol5/iss1/7>

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*James Young,*  
*Arial K. Eaton.*

GEN. ARIAL K. EATON.

## GEN. A. K. EATON.\*

*Mr. President, Pioneer Law Makers of Iowa, Ladies and Gentlemen:*—I do not stop to debate with myself the propriety of a son offering a tribute to the memory of his father, but gladly accept your kind invitation to speak on the life, character and legislative services of Arial K. Eaton. The exhaustive biography of his old-time personal friend and co-legislator, P. M. Casady, which was published in your records of the re-union of 1898, and the elaborate paper read by A. K. Eaton himself on "Recollections of the 3d General Assembly," at your re-union in 1892, which was also published, render it unnecessary for me to burden you with many details.

He was born amid the hills of New Hampshire, at Sutton, in Merrimack county, December 1, 1813, and died July 16, 1896, at his home in Osage, where he had lived for more than forty years.

His was an heroic ancestry. His grandfather followed the regulars from Concord to Boston; was at the battle of Bunker Hill; became lieutenant and served throughout the Revolutionary War. He was of the stern Puritan stock. He belonged to the New England race of Puritans: that race that challenged the haughty slave-holding cavalier of the South and was victor in the combat. It is the Puritan of New England that has made America what she is.

In his childhood his first morning view was of the sun-kissed granite crags of Kearsarge just across the valley from his home. That rugged mountain was worthy to give its name to the American ocean terror. Just over the mountain was the birth-place of the leonine Webster, and a little farther away of the brilliant lawyer and afterward president of the United States, Franklin Pierce. At the foot of it

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\*This paper was prepared at the invitation of the committee of arrangements, by Hon. Willard L. Eaton, son of Gen. A. K. Eaton, and read at the Biennial Reunion of the Pioneer Law Makers of Iowa, held in the State Historical Art Room, February 14 and 15, 1900.

Senator William E. Chandler lives today. Adjoining the Eaton farm on the north was the birth-place of Gen. John Eaton and his family, for many years United States Commissioner of Education, and now in charge of educational matters at Porto Rico. Just beyond and across the valley lived the Pillsburys, now of Minneapolis, the elder members of whom went to school to my father in his young manhood. At an early age he became fatherless, and somehow, upon the rockiest of all farms, his mother lived and he managed to obtain an academic education. He was scholarly from his childhood and always an idealist. Those New England men of the earlier time communed with the mountains. They seemed to absorb the very integrity of the granite upon which they walked. I have wondered if those men of the earlier day, as they walked amid the hills and looked upon the purpling horizons and stood in the presence of the granite crag and lofty mountain, did not get visions of great things that we know nothing of. I have wondered whether great stone faces, like that in the Franconian mountains, did not form themselves out of the hills and become imbued with life and speak to them great thoughts in a language of which we can never know. It must make men kingly and majestic to walk and talk with mountain brook and majestic New England scenery.

My father began teaching when he was seventeen. At the age of twenty-three he turned his face toward the unknown, trackless west. He finally reached Detroit, and lack of money compelled him to walk 300 miles across Michigan to Washington, Ohio. Stern necessity then pointed out to him a vacant log house, which he fitted up with slabs on pins for desks and began a select school with two pupils. His room was soon filled, however, and he taught there for three years and then made his way to Randolph county, Indiana. For several years he was county auditor of that county. He was admitted to the bar in 1842 in Randolph county, Indiana. On December 7, 1844, he was married to my mother,

Sarah Jarnigan, who still lives at the old home in Osage. In 1846 he again turned his face toward the west and crossed the Mississippi and settled in Delhi, Delaware county, Iowa, in the second log cabin built upon the town plat. In this log cabin I was born October 13, 1848. He was soon elected to the office of prosecuting attorney, and in 1850 to the 3d General Assembly, and re-elected in 1852. We are now speaking of a time half a century ago. The mists and the shadows have gathered about those days and to call them up seems like the stirring of the breeze upon the mountains. But two years before that the Indians had been removed from northeastern Iowa. In his first election but 350 votes were cast in all, west of Dubuque county. But fourteen families so far as known lived west of Delaware county. Eleven of those lived in the neighborhood of Cedar Falls and Janesville, and three in the neighborhood of old Bradford, formerly near the present site of Nashua. When he entered the legislature he represented an empire. Its boundary on the east was the mighty Mississippi; on the south the south lines of Dubuque, Delaware, Buchanan and Black Hawk counties to the Des Moines river; on the west the Des Moines river itself; on the north the Minnesota line. All this vast country, except what was termed the Turkey river country, was included in his district. To call up such a fact may well stagger credulity. In the presence of it one ought to pause and reverently, with uncovered head and uplifted heart, exclaim "What hath God wrought!" That tenantless empire of fifty years ago has become the garden of the world. The smiling face of prosperity looks upon it. Happiness walks its highways and virtue guards it. It challenges comparison with any other tract of its size under the sun.

When Ariel K. Eaton left his cabin home for Iowa City, the then capital, to attend the 3d General Assembly, he walked the entire distance from Delhi and received pay for a mileage of 150 miles. The compensation of legislators in

those days was \$2.00 per day for the first fifty days and \$1.00 per day thereafter, and mileage at ten cents per mile. It was in this session that the Code of 1851 was adopted, and it is a priceless heritage to me to scan the journals of that session and find the name of A. K. Eaton mentioned so frequently and so honorably. He was thoughtful and scholarly to the day of his death, and it was fitting that he should be chairman of the committee on schools in those earlier days when the foundations of our State were being laid. In those days was born our present school system, which is the delight and pride of Iowa. He served on many other committees, but it seems to me from my knowledge of him, and remembering that in all his life he took a deep interest in our schools, that he must have been more interested in educational matters than in any other, even his chosen profession of the law. There are those still living and in this presence who served with him and who know of his energy, his untiring labor and his valuable services in the 3d and 4th sessions of the General Assembly of Iowa. While a member of the Legislature he had the good fortune to become acquainted with that unique character in American history, George W. Jones. He was his loyal supporter in his successful race for the first United States senatorship of Iowa. The friendship between those men thus early formed was lasting and unwavering. Their deaths were within a week of each other. It was a beautiful sight, and one never to be forgotten, to see those two men together in later years when their heads became white with the blossoms of age; when they lived in the glory of the past and without fear of the future. In 1855, through the good offices of Gen. Jones, my father was appointed receiver of the land office, and first removed to Decorah and finally with the land office settled at Osage where he became one of the original town proprietors and where the balance of his life was spent. The last time my father met with you was at your re-union in 1894, when the whole State, as it were, under the proclamation of Governor

Jackson, met in the capitol to do honor to that marvelous character, Gen. George W. Jones. My father sat beside him on the speaker's platform in the House. Gen. Jones was then ninety years of age. A. K. Eaton, who was then over eighty years of age, spoke from the same platform. You will remember him, tall and stately, with the stoop that always comes in the afternoon of life, as he spoke of the early days of Iowa. His mental characteristics were somewhat peculiar. He had the integrity of his own granite hills of New Hampshire. His purposes were fixed, but they were always upward. He was utterly incapable of a dishonest thought or act. His face showed strength of character, and while he never uttered a joke in his life, yet he enjoyed pure wit and frequently indulged in it. No man ever heard him utter a word that was not perfectly proper for any parlor in the land. During his declining years he was the most familiar figure upon our streets. He had a smile and a kindly word for every man, woman and child. Somehow, he instinctively knew where poverty, distress and trouble dwelt, and was a constant visitor to such as needed his encouraging presence. The angel of peace hovered over his declining years. He went out from this world without fear, for he knew that his upright life made him a prince wherever he might be, either here or in the hereafter. His funeral was held under the trees in the park and there were gathered such a company as never met before. Men, women and children who never saw the inside of a church were there, for they were his friends. Our little world said of him, "The elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world 'This was a man.'" And he was a Pioneer Law Maker of Iowa.

Gentlemen: the twilight and the shadows are gathering about the most of you. Remember that there is no such thing as death, for your works which represent you will follow you. Your friends, or your sons, will speak as I have done, and keep your memory green. I thank you.

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