



Western Reserve Historical Society News

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Western Reserve Profiles: Cyrus Eaton

The death of Cyrus Eaton on May 9, 1979, marked the end of an era. In his ninety-five action-filled years, he made a permanent impact on industry, finance, education, agriculture and international affairs.

Endowed with a keen intellect and good health, he rejoiced in hard work and strenuous play. Intensely human, he made no pretense of infallibility but always strove to do his highest and best.

Compressing the Eaton career into a small compass is an impossibility. His papers, which were moved from his Terminal Tower offices to the Western Reserve Historical Society on October 10, 1978, comprise 300 boxes of legal-file-drawer size, plus fourteen oversize items. Some dozen boxes concern the Pugwash Conferences alone, and there is substantial related information all through the files.

Pugwash, in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, Canada, is where the Cyrus Eaton story began, with his birth there on December 27, 1883. His father was a practical and successful merchant and farmer, who also served for some years as local postmaster. To his mother and his early teacher, Margaret King, he owed his lifelong passion for reading and learning. In the twenties, in gratitude, he built a modern educational facility for the children of Pugwash on the site of the old one-room structure and named it the Margaret King School. During the same period, he twice assisted in the rebuilding of the Pugwash business district, after it had been ravaged by fire.

For high school, young Eaton was obliged to move thirty miles from home to the county seat to attend the Amherst Academy, and thence to Ontario where he studied at Woodstock College, actually a preparatory school despite its name. In 1901 he entered McMaster University and in 1905 was awarded the A.B. degree with honors in philosophy.

In 1901 Dr. Charles Aubrey Eaton, Cyrus' uncle, was called from Toronto to Cleveland to the ministry of the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, whose principal parishioner was John D. Rockefeller, then living in Cleveland. That summer Cyrus also came to Cleveland, at the insistence of Uncle Charley, and immediately sought work to make money for college expenses. Responding to a sign in a hotel window, he was hired as night clerk. An invitation to dinner at Forest Hill from the Rockefellers to the Eaton family included Cyrus, who hesitated because of the conflict with his new job. Summoning up his courage, he consulted the hotel manager, and was told in no uncertain terms, "If I had



Cyrus Eaton's graduation picture from McMaster University in 1905.

an opportunity like that, I'd go without asking."

Mrs. Rockefeller was shocked at the nature of her young guest's employment and importuned her husband to find a place for Cyrus on the Forest Hill staff. Thus it was that he went to work for Rockefeller and returned each summer while he was in college. The admiration that he formed for Rockefeller directed his post-university path into the world of business and industry and led him to say repeatedly in later years that Rockefeller was the greatest industrial genius the world has ever known.

Eaton's first real vacation in years came after graduation. He spent the summer as a cowhand on a ranch in Saskatchewan and returned to Cleveland bursting with good health and eager to get on in the business world. He worked for Rockefeller's East Ohio Gas Co. in Cleveland for a year, and then in 1907 set off for Brandon, Manitoba, as representative of a New York banking syndicate that had been formed to bring natural gas to this and other small Canadian towns.

The November day he obtained the all-important franchise from Brandon, as he left the Mayor's office, he heard the newsboys on the street shouting, "Read all about it! Read all about the panic on Wall Street!" Eaton's New York syndicate collapsed, giving him, in recompense, the right to the hard-won franchise if he

to finance it. That was a big if, since American finance was completely paralyzed. Ultimately he got the financing he needed from a Canadian bank in Montreal and, for the first time, was in business for himself. From the modest beginning in Brandon, Eaton and newly recruited associates branched out to bring gas and electricity to much of the Canadian and American midwest. That was the start of a vast public utility empire.

In 1907 Eaton married Margaret House, daughter of a prominent Cleveland physician. Five of their seven children are still living. In 1912 he bought a farm in Sagamore Hills, Ohio, which he named "Acadia" after Evangeline-land in his native Nova Scotia. In 1913 he became a naturalized citizen of the United States. In 1916 he became a partner in Otis & Co., a powerful investment banking firm, through which he financed his public utility companies and other subsequent far-flung enterprises in iron ore, steel, coal, railroads, paint, chemicals, rubber and lake shipping.

The complete career of Cyrus Eaton undoubtedly will someday be detailed in a full-length biography. There is room here, however, merely to examine a few of the many ways in which his activities have contributed to the history of Ohio, particularly Cleveland, and finally to look at his campaign of twenty-five years for better international understanding and peace.

The Eaton entry into the steel industry came about in the mid-twenties. When returning from a Nova Scotia

camping trip with his son Cy in the wilderness Kejimikugik Lakes, he read in a Boston paper that Trumbull Steel Co. of Warren, Ohio, was in financial difficulties. A banking syndicate, through which Trumbull was raising urgently needed funds, had abruptly recalled a bond issue because of dissatisfaction with an audit. On arrival home, Eaton hurriedly arranged a meeting with a committee considering whether to put the company in receivership. The committee was skeptical of Eaton's offer to underwrite the Trumbull securities until they followed his suggestion of calling Cleveland Trust Company to see if his check for \$18,000,000 would be honored. With Trumbull as a start, Eaton thoroughly grounded himself in steel technology, assembled an able executive team, selected other likely independent companies and, in 1930 created from them Republic Steel Corporation, the nation's third largest steel company, based in Cleveland.

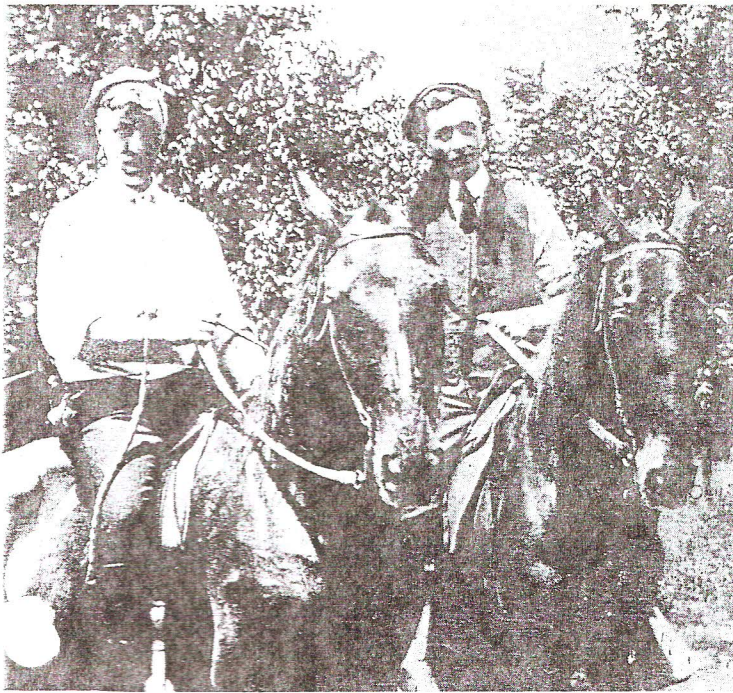
Also in the twenties, Cleveland was threatened with the loss of The Sherwin-Williams Company when the bank-trustee for the Sherwin estate had all but reached agreement to sell its stockholdings in the venerable paint and chemical company to a large out-of-state corporation. Eaton purchased a substantial holding for himself and lined up enough other like-minded shareholders to keep Sherwin-Williams in Cleveland.

Eaton made his first investment in Chesapeake and Ohio Railway stock and became a director in 1943 as a result of his earlier alliance with Robert R. Young, C & O chairman, in a fight for adoption of Federal regulations requiring competitive bidding for public utility and railroad securities. After fierce contests beginning in 1938, the Eaton-Young forces prevailed over the Eastern banking interests that had considered such financing their prerogative since time immemorial. In 1954, when Young moved to the helm of the New York Central Railroad, Eaton bought Young's C & O stock to become major individual shareholder and chairman of the board. Cleveland has been C & O headquarters since that time.

When the Cleveland Street Railway Company fell on evil days in the forties and public transportation was a shambles, Eaton headed the delicate negotiations first with Mayor Blythin and then with his successor, Mayor Lausche, that led to municipal purchase and operation of the system. He also arranged the financing for CTS, as it was then called. Today, in expanded form, it has become RTA (Regional Transit Authority).

Of the many civic organizations and institutions to which Eaton belonged and supported, a favorite was the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, of which he was the last remaining founder-trustee at the time of his death. He was a trustee of the Cleveland Metropolitan Park District in its formative years, from 1930 to 1939,

Cyrus Eaton (right) and his uncle, Rev. Charles A. Eaton, pastor of the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, at Forest Hill.



and donated fifty-eight of Acadia's acres to the park in 1955. An outdoorsman and athlete all his life, he believed that everyone in the city should have ready access to trails, woodlands and picnic places.

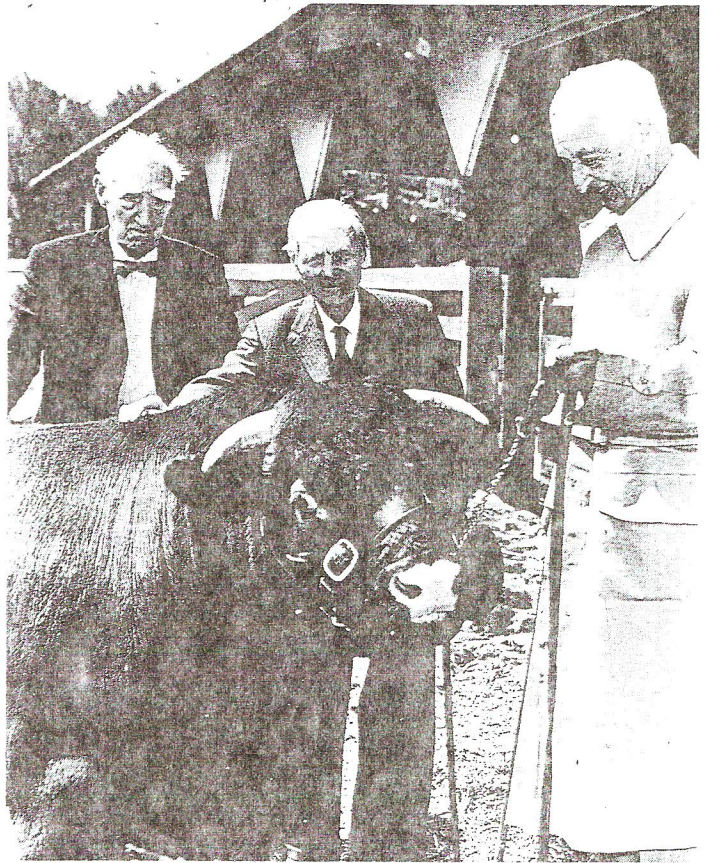
An equally staunch supporter of higher education, Eaton worked closely with Dr. C. V. Thomas, general secretary of the YMCA, to develop that organization's night school into Fenn College, now Cleveland State University. For many long years, he served as a trustee and benefactor of Case School of Applied Science, later Case Institute of Technology and now part of Case Western Reserve University. He was also a trustee of Denison University in Granville, Ohio, as well as The University of Chicago, which owes its beginnings to John D. Rockefeller.

With his interest in agriculture dating back to his boyhood on the family farm in Nova Scotia, Eaton built his Acadia Farms near Cleveland and his Deep Cove Farms in Nova Scotia, as well, into world famous sources of prize pedigreed Shorthorn cattle. Acadia has been a mecca not only for livestock experts from the world over but also for many other visitors from near and far.

Of all of Mr. Eaton's endeavors, the one to which he was most dedicated in his later years was the quest for international friendship, disarmament and peace. In this work he had the full collaboration of his second wife, the daughter of a well known Cleveland judge, Anne Kinder Eaton, whom he married in 1957.

Always ahead of his time, Eaton delivered a characteristically prophetic utterance on his seventy-first birthday in 1954 when he called for brand new ways of thinking in this exciting but perplexing nuclear age. From that statement emerged the Pugwash Conferences, named of course for his Nova Scotia birthplace where the initial meetings were held under his auspices. There have been many Pugwash Conferences on a variety of subjects, but those that have had the most profound effect in shaping international opinion are the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. The first of these was convened in Pugwash at the request of Eaton's close friend, Bertrand Russell, and Albert Einstein in 1957 with the participation of twenty eminent nuclear scientists from ten major countries, west and east, including the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic. The participants concluded their week-long proceedings by issuing a declaration warning against the hazards of nuclear warfare and calling for disarmament. To this and later PCOSWA meetings can be traced important international agreements, including Salt I and Salt II.

Eaton had the courage of his convictions. Never one to be daunted by opposition or criticism, Eaton strove almost singlehandedly for many years for rapprochement between the capitalist world, of which he was a



Nobel Prize winners Lord John Boyd Orr (left) and Sir Norman Angell (center) admire a prize Shorthorn bull shown by host Cyrus Eaton in 1960 on his Acadia Farms. Lord Boyd Orr won the prize in 1949 as first head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Sir Norman, writer on international affairs, received his in 1933.

firm exponent and an outstanding symbol, and the communist world. He made friends of Soviet leaders like Khrushchev and his successors, Kosygin and Brezhnev. A meeting with Brezhnev, in fact, took place at the White House with President Nixon saying in an aside to Eaton, "You've been at this twenty years, while I'm just a Johnny-come-lately." Eaton visited the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Chile, Cuba, Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam, as well as the major Western nations. He vigorously opposed American intervention in Vietnam from the beginning.

In the words of an editorial titled "A Titan of Tolerance" in the Knight newspapers at his death, "If ever there was a man who could bridge the gap between capitalism and communism, poverty and riches, the practical and the intellectual, it was Cyrus Eaton."

Betty Royon

Betty Royon of Hudson, Ohio, was assistant to Cyrus Eaton for forty-one years and is now president of Hudson Heritage Association.