

Eaton, John Rust ^[1]

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by Claiborne T. Smith, Jr., 1986

12 Aug. 1772–5 June 1830

John Rust Eaton, planter and legislator, was born in Granville County ^[2], the only son of Charles Rust Eaton (1743–1822) and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Osborne Jeffreys. Charles Eaton, the youngest son of William Eaton (d. 1759), a prominent early settler in the area, was a representative from Granville to the Provincial Congress ^[3] in Halifax (4 Apr. 1776) and served during the Revolutionary War ^[4] as lieutenant colonel of militia.

There are indications that John Rust Eaton was educated at the University of Pennsylvania, but the records for that institution are incomplete for students who did not graduate. Eaton was a close personal friend of William H. Winder of Baltimore who did attend the university, and Governor Benjamin Williams ^[5] later corresponded with Eaton about educational facilities in Philadelphia. In 1794 Eaton read law in Richmond, Va., and in May of that year wrote his father that he would be returning home in the fall. In 1799 he was private secretary to William R. Davie ^[6], then governor of North Carolina. Entering politics, he represented Granville in the House of Commons in 1801, 1802, and 1812. As a member of the house, he has been described as active but not a leader. Like his father before him, Eaton was interested in racine and breeding horses ^[7]. The most noted horse from his stable was the stallion Columbus, sired by the well-known Sir Archie ^[8].

Eaton's surviving correspondence was given to the North Carolina Historical Society not long after his death and is now in the Southern Historical Collection in Chapel Hill. Among his correspondents prominent in the state were Nathaniel Macon ^[9] and Governor Benjamin Williams ^[5], who had married Eaton's first cousin. He also corresponded with William H. Winder of Maryland and General James Winchester of Tennessee. Winchester handled affairs relating to land Eaton owned on the Obion River in that state. The Eaton letters were edited by J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton ^[10] and published in 1910.

On 15 Sept. 1801 Eaton married Susan Somerville, the only daughter of John Somerville of Granville County. They had seven sons and four daughters. Eaton's wife survived him by twelve years, dying in 1842 at the age of fifty-nine. They and other members of the family were buried in a private cemetery two miles east of Williamsboro. Of the sons, Charles Rust Eaton represented Granville in the House of Commons during 1835–37; his brother George was a state senator in 1844. John Somerville Eaton, the oldest son, married Sarah Burwell in 1827. When their only son, named John Rust for his grandfather, was killed in a hunting accident in 1841 at the age of thirteen, his parents turned to religion. They were the prime movers behind the establishment of an Episcopal church in the town of Henderson; the parish was named the Holy Innocents ^[11] as a memorial of young Eaton's death.

References:

John B. Boddie, *Southside Virginia Families*, vol. 1 (1955).

Patrick N. Edgar, *The American Race-Turf Register* (1833).

J. G. deR. Hamilton, ed., "John R. Eaton Letters," *James Sprunt Historical Monographs* 9 (1910). ^[12]

Letter, Lawrence F. London to Claudia Hunter (in possession of Claudia Hunter, Henderson, N.C.).

Blackwell P. Robinson, *William R. Davie* (1957).

Additional Resources:

John Rust Eaton Papers, 1794-1815, 1910 (collection no. 00234-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Eaton,John_Rust.html ^[13] (accessed February 26, 2014).

Boddie, John Bennett. *Southside Virginia Families, Volume 1*. Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing Co. 2003 (orig. 1955). 184. <http://books.google.com/books?id=yruvKfanqvAC&pg=PA184#v=onepage&q&f=false> ^[14] (accessed February 26, 2014).

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