

Behrens-Eaton Legacy

The Eaton Gift

Governors:
Josh Divine
Denny Mills
Mike Dahl

March 2024



JUDGE'S CORNER

by Debbie Stokes

In the summer of 1942, Judge Eaton and 7,000 other American soldiers took a ship from Staten Island to Port Tewfik on the lower end of the Suez Canal courtesy of the United States Army. They were 42 days on the high seas, cruising some 23,000 miles on the Aquitania, a very old Cunard ocean liner that had been requisitioned for the war effort. There were stops in Rio de Janeiro, Capetown, and the Gulf of Aden.

The voyage was full of hazards. On the way to Rio, a German sub was sunk within 75 miles of the Aquitania. The subs came even closer on the leg from Rio to Capetown. The judge was not allowed to write to anyone about the specifics of the voyage until the end of the war. He described it in detail in a letter to his mother after the restrictions on the details were lifted.

“From Rio we head southeast, it got colder and finally we neared Capetown. We were due to come in early in the morning. The afternoon before, Capetown broadcast news of a sinking of a ship enroute to the Gold Coast, some 20 miles north of Table Bay. We pricked up our ears. A few hours later a ship was sunk 200 miles further north. About 11 pm we got a further note - - - a ship had been sunk 12 miles off our present course near where we would be about 4 am. A hasty council was called and it was decided we dare not proceed. We broke radio silence with an appeal for an escort and the ship turned due south and headed for the South Pole at top speed. Everyone was called to boat stations wearing an overcoat and with a canteen of water. They stood on the open decks for hours, while it got colder and colder. Finally in the middle of the night the troops were permitted to go to bed and we were notified that an escort was on the way. At daybreak we started north again; shortly thereafter planes of an air escort showed up and about 11 am an English destroyer and a French corvette. The men lined the rails and cheered and the corvette signalled in return ‘we got one sub on the way out’. Through the middle of the day we went north at full speed and at 4 pm got behind the breakwater of Table Bay.”

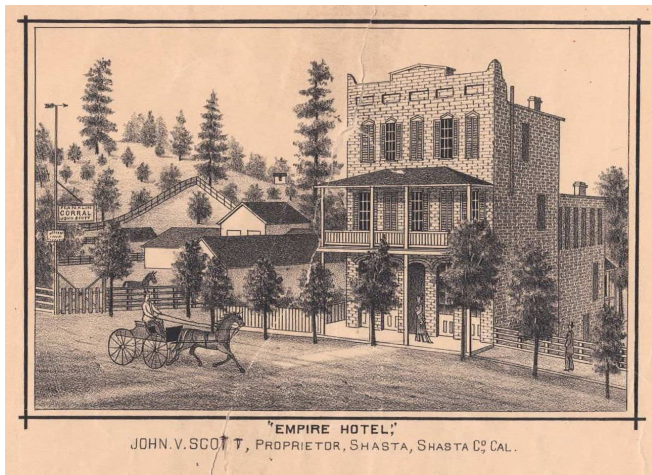


Shasta County Treasurer Edna Behrens Eaton

By Mike Dahl

Judge Richard Behrens Eaton left an impressive legacy as one of the most prominent and respected community leaders in the history of Shasta County. The family archives are conserved and exhibited by The Eaton Gift via the Behrens-Eaton House Museum. The Judge's notoriety is shared by his mother, Edna Behrens Eaton, who rose to prominence beginning as a young schoolteacher in Whitmore to becoming the Shasta County Treasurer. Edna had a profound impact and influence on her son and our community.

Edna Behrens was born January 30, 1883, in the home of her widowed maternal grandmother Susanna Kruger Kountz in the town of Shasta. The Kountz house was on Main Street north of Trinity Alley. Shasta was her home growing up. Soon a baby sister Ella, and brother Earl, were born.



The Empire Hotel.

One of the most prestigious buildings in the town of Shasta was the Empire Hotel, owned and operated by John Scott. Edna's father Charles was hired as a clerk and was a loyal employee until 1890 when he leased the hotel from Scott. This is where the family moved, making a luxury hotel the home of 7-year-old Edna and her siblings.

The 1890s were an impactful phase for young Edna. These were very dynamic times. Shasta had lost its influence as the center of commerce

and government, especially after the Central Pacific Railroad bypassed the town and created Redding, which became the county seat. The gold rush was over, changing the regional economy. Plus, there was extreme racial tension culminating with the 1886 expulsion of Chinese people and the burning of Chinatown in Redding. Edna was witnessing and experiencing accelerated social change.

Edna's father Charles Behrens became very accomplished during his years managing the hotel as Wells Fargo agent, constable, and postmaster. As constable, he was first on the scene of the infamous Ruggle's brothers stagecoach robbery and murder. In late 1898 he ran as a Republican for Shasta County Sheriff and won. In those days, local offices were partisan, unlike today. The county seat was in Redding causing a dilemma for Charles and his family. To be sheriff, he needed to reside in Redding. Conveniently, John Scott owned a new home on West Street in Redding and agreed to sell it to Charles for \$2,500 in gold coin. The home was new, built in 1895, so the family moved to the bustling City of Redding. Edna enrolled in the first class at Shasta High School.



Edna Behrens c1900.

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Women had limited career options during this era. One choice was teaching, which Edna embraced, by taking the teacher's exam when she was only a junior in high school! After all that, she studied for two years at Berkely and Stanford. She launched her teaching career with her first semester instructing in rural Whitmore and then moved on to other locations such as French Gulch, Round Mountain, Junction, Sunny Hill, and one that would change her life, Coram.

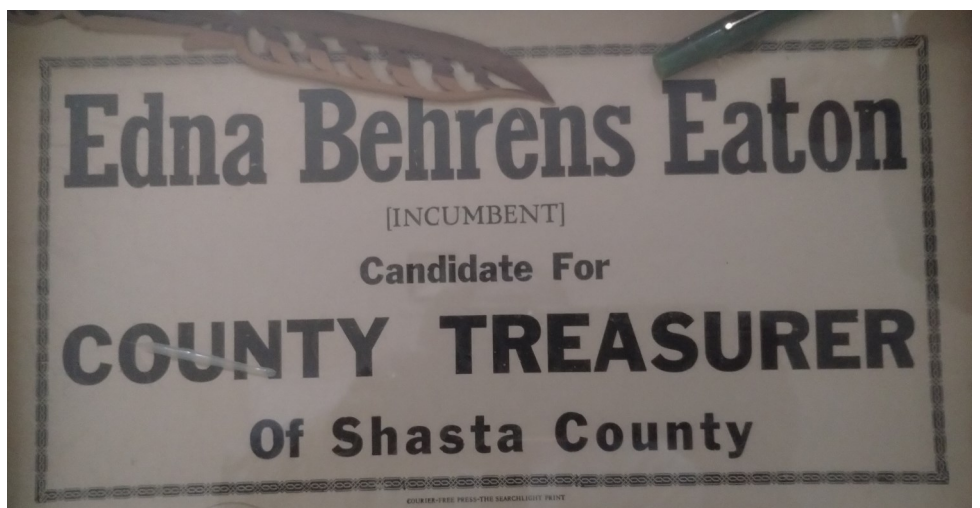
Coram was the site of a copper smelter and small mining community. A young chemical engineer named Walter McCrum Eaton had arrived from Oregon and was employed as the chief chemist of the operation. Coincidentally, young Edna took a position as schoolteacher at the same location. Eventually they crossed paths and soon a romance began. The two married in 1913 and relocated to Albany Oregon where baby Richard was born the following year. Edna and Walter soon moved to the new County of Jefferson in central Oregon where he became the county surveyor in Madras prior to enlisting in the Army.



Edna and baby Richard c1914.

World War I was a life changing event. Walter was commissioned as a first lieutenant of Chemical Warfare Service and died in 1918. The cause of death was the pandemic. This was only a year after her father Charles had died. With the loss of her husband, Edna was faced with dire consequences, leaving her a young widow, alone with a 4-year-old child. She packed up and moved home to Redding where she lived the rest of her life at 1520 West Street. The unexpected homecoming expanded the Redding household that included her mother and sister. In fact, all four would spend the rest of their lives at this location except for a brief hiatus for Richard when he attended college and served in World War II.

Edna had a strong work ethic. In 1920-21 she worked for the post office and was a Home Service Volunteer in Shasta County for the American Red Cross. The following year she went back to teaching for one term. This proved temporary. Like her father, Edna had higher ambitions and was drawn by the lure of elected public office. She announced and filed her candidacy for Shasta County Treasurer and successfully campaigned and won the election in 1922. She continued to run every four years and won reelection until she retired as county treasurer in 1939.



Shasta County Treasurer campaign poster c1923.

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Edna also had a passion for history that she passed on to her son. She was one of the original benefactors of the Shasta Historical Society that was formed on January 18, 1930, under the name *Trails of '49*. Her cofounders were Miss Alice Reading, Miss May Hazel Southern, Mrs. George Lowden, Charles Browne, Francis Carr, Lew Carrigan, Mr. and Mrs. B. F. Loomis, Charles Litsch, Mrs. Nettie Prehn, Mrs. Amelia Early, Mrs. Thyra Heffelfinger, Fred Dersch, James Bartlett, and M.E. Dittmar. For local historians, these names are very familiar. Edna authored several articles for the *Covered Wagon*. Richard followed his mother's passion and became a well-known local historian.

Edna was a dynamo. She collaborated with other influential and powerful women to improve her community. One organization was The Women's Improvement Association, founded in 1902. The club's early members were instrumental in securing a \$10,000 construction grant for the Carnegie Library built on Yuba Street. The group also planted shade trees, paid for sidewalks around Redding's downtown business district, organized community trash cleanups, and encouraged officials to round up stray dogs and corral errant livestock. These energetic women helped civilize and transform Redding from a dusty railroad town to the hub of Far Northern California. She also helped establish the local chapter of the American Association of University Women.

Edna left an enduring imprint on Shasta County. She was strong, courageous, intelligent, and dedicated. She died on December 4, 1969, in Redding at the age of 86, leaving her sister Ella and her son Richard as the two surviving family members living in the Classical Revival Victorian home on West Street, the future home of the Behrens-Eaton Museum.



Guests Galore

By Janel Longnecker

What a great year it has been for visitors to the Behrens-Eaton home. Individuals, families, and small curious groups seem to have come out of the woodwork. More and more folks have discovered that the home (a special jewel of Redding) is a great venue to visit. Docents are keeping busy.

What initially was a special September gathering to celebrate and honor those who served our nation has grown over the years. Now we honor our firefighters, police officers, city and county officials, medical personnel... all who make our county stronger. This year many found themselves joining pianist Pat Karch in singing patriotic songs. Apple pie, ice cream, and root beer floats were a welcome finale to the day.

In December our Holiday Open House was a HUGE success that drew ninety-plus visitors. The home was decorated from top to bottom and was beautiful! Adrienne Jacoby played the well-tuned 1870s square grand piano that has been in the home since before the Behren's family moved in. Happy, smiling folks found themselves humming as they explored from room to room. Of special note the cookies and hot mulled cider were well received.

The welcome to the 2023 Grand Jury members was an informal luncheon held in the museum garden. It seemed a great start to their formidable task. Judge Richard Eaton would have been happy to welcome them.

We encourage you to join us for a tour. We are constantly doing research and updating our displays. Docents are eager to share. The beautiful gardens make a great venue for weddings, birthdays, and special occasions. See you.



TREASURES OF THE MUSEUM

By Kathy Grace

Here at the museum, we are transforming the closet in the Judge's bedroom from a dressing room (which of course he really never had) into a display of his army career. While gathering items for this display we found several paperback books that, at first glance, looked unimportant for the museum. We found, however, a very interesting detail in that during World War II a book drive was started to send reading material to the armed forces. Nice idea but *How to Prune Your Roses* and such books were not very interesting to our fighting men and women plus the hard bound books were extremely heavy and bulky. In 1943 the "Armed Forces Editions" program was set up. Titles were selected of both fiction and non-fiction to be made into paper back form in a size that would fit in a uniform pocket, hence the term "pocketbooks" was coined. The books were made of lighter weight paper and distributed free. It was thought that the quality of the books would endure through about six readings, but the program became so popular that at times there might be up to 30 people waiting for a chance to read any particular book. Some surprising titles were very popular such as *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Chicken Every Sunday*, books that reminded the troops of home. Some titles were considered a bit too risqué but it was decided "...if the G.I.s want something a bit trashy then they should get it." We have several of these "Armed Forces Edition" books here at the museum along with so much more in our new Military Career Room. Come in and see this new display.



Save the Date!

The annual Redding Cultural Cruise returns this April 12th & 13th to celebrate Arts, Culture & Creativity Month. The Behrens-Eaton House Museum invites all to take a trip back in time. Visitors will discover the restored Victorian home of the 1890's containing original family furniture and artifacts. Costumed docents will greet you and take you on a fascinating tour of local history. Hours of Operations will be Friday, April 12th, 4:00-6:30 and Saturday, April 13th, 11:00-4:00.

FROM THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

March 1, 2024

The Governors of The Eaton Gift are pleased to announce that Josh Devine has joined our board of directors. He replaces Arch Pugh who retired last year. Josh is an accomplished attorney practicing in Redding and was appointed by the Shasta County Superior Court. According to the wishes of Judge Eaton, The Eaton Gift has three governors. One is appointed by the Superior Court, one by the Shasta Historical Society (Denny), and one by Shasta College (Mike). The Eaton Gift is the non-profit responsible for the administration and operation of the museum. The three-member board was reorganized making Denny Mills President, Josh Devine Vice-President, and Mike Dahl Secretary-Treasurer. We welcome Josh!



Eaton Gift Governor, Josh Divine.

The Behrens-Eaton Museum complex continues renovation. The street landscaping along West and Butte Street has been completed by McEntire Landscaping. The Eaton Gift provided two trees, plants, and vegetation along with irrigation for the strips of land owned by the City of Redding between the sidewalk and the curb. The beautification replaces bare dirt, weeds, and frequent trash. We consider this a gift to our city and our neighborhood. The Eaton Gift will maintain the landscaping with water, pruning, and maintenance.

The Eaton Gift is also in the final planning phase of the Eaton Garden Master Plan for the empty parcel behind the museum. The plan will include walking trails around the gardens and a refurbished lower parking lot. We will share renderings in our June newsletter and hope to commence work in July.



The Eaton Gift Facebook Page

If you have a Facebook account you could be getting tidbits of Behrens Eaton-related Shasta County history in your Facebook feed. All you need do is search for one of our posts and click the like button in any of our Facebook articles, or go to our Facebook page, *The Eaton Gift*, and click 'Follow'.



YOU'RE INVITED

Come, tour the Judge's lovely old home built in 1895. The furnishings are mostly original and the gardens are restful. There is no cost for tours. Donations are of course gratefully accepted, but not expected.

Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10-4, Saturday 1-4. Other days of the week are available with prior arrangement by calling (530)241-3454 or (530)241-3455.





MEMBERSHIP

Please consider supporting the Behrens-Eaton House Museum by purchasing a membership. Membership fees keep our doors open. If you're receiving this newsletter and are not a member, please become one. If you haven't renewed your membership in a while, it might be time to update. You can do either by completing the following form and returning it with your check in the mail, or you can renew online at our website <https://www.eatonhousemuseum.org>.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Annual Membership Dues: Single - \$50 Family - \$75 Business - \$150 Corporate - \$500

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ City _____ St _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please circle membership level above. Indicate amount enclosed _____



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