

**Eaton Family  
Papers, 1849-1897****SC17395**

**QUANTITY:** 1 box (0.50 cubic ft.)  
**ACCESS:** Open to research  
**ACQUISITION:** Gift, Martin A. Edwards, 1981  
**PROCESSED BY:** Fred Bassett, Senior Librarian, Manuscripts and Special Collections,  
New York State Library, January 2011

**Biographical Note:**

Levi Eaton, a stone mason, was born about 1825 in Canada, most likely, Montreal, Quebec. It appears he was of French-Canadian heritage, and his name was Leon Hétu. He probably changed his name to Levi Eaton at the time he emigrated to the United States, about the early 1850s. Settling in Fort Ann, Washington County, New York, he pursued his trade as a stone mason. Census records for 1860 and 1870 show he was married and had three children at the time.

Military service records indicate Levi Eaton enlisted in August 1862 at Fort Ann and shortly thereafter was mustered in as a private in Company D of the 123<sup>rd</sup> New York Infantry Regiment. His regiment, which was comprised chiefly of recruits from Washington County, was actively involved in a number of significant battles and campaigns during the war, including the Battle of Gettysburg, the capture of Atlanta, and Sherman's March to the Sea. He was mustered out of service in June 1865 and returned to Fort Ann to resume his trade as a stone mason.

**Scope and Content Note:**

These papers consist chiefly of letters Levi Eaton sent to his wife, Elizabeth, while serving in the army during the Civil War. The letters not only record his experiences on the battlefield, but also reveal his attitudes towards the war and his religious sentiments and that he was homesick. On February 9, 1863, he wrote from a camp near Stafford Court House, Virginia: "I live in hope to get home. I don't care how soon. If they would leave it to me I would settle it damn soon." His desire to get the war over soon is stated more emphatically in letter written at Camp Williams, near Stafford Court House, on April 6, 1863: "We get enough to eat, but I am sick of this war. I am willing to do everything to help it along so I can get home. I have not been in a house since I left Salem, N.Y., and have not heard a church bell since I left N.Y. Now tell all my friends not to stand a draft but to come willingly to put this rebellion down."

The letters also document the fact that he and his fellow soldiers of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Regiment were actively involved in a number of significant battles and campaigns during the war. After the Battle of Gettysburg, on July 6, 1863, he wrote: "It has been 20 days since we have started, but you will be glad to hear that we have had a hard battle and that I have come out all right. We made the rebels start for Virginia. The battle was at Gettysburg. We are after the 'rebs' now."

Later, when the 123<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was engaged in the campaign that ultimately led to the Union Army occupation of Atlanta, Georgia, from June to October 1864, he wrote a number of letters that provided not only a vivid depiction of the battle, but were often peppered with personal comments and anecdotes. In the letter written on the battlefield near Altona Heights, Georgia, on June 1, 1864, he wrote: "We are laying on the battlefield now. This is the 8<sup>th</sup> day since the battle commenced. Our division was the first to advance and we lost sixteen hundred men in about two hours. The colonel lost one leg. He was hit with a grape shot in the knee joint ... I got out without a scratch ... This letter is written on the battlefield and the muskets are cracking every minute. Keep up good courage and trust in God."

When the Union Army captured Atlanta, Eaton recorded his thoughts and observations in his letter of September 4, 1864: "We were the second regiment to go in ... After going a few miles we halted and a courier came up saying a squad of our cavalry was in the city. We then marched on and about 3 P.M. took possession of the city and the 'stars and stripes' waved over the Court House ... The store houses were filled with tobacco and cigars and we have all we want to last 3 months ... All is quiet here now and the 'Rebs' have skedaddled. Gen. Sherman [is] following close after them. The Reb army is about 'played' out now ... Before leaving here the enemy destroyed an immense sight of property ... a hundred car loads of ammunition. We certainly have had a great victory."

Commenting on Sherman's March to the Sea, Eaton wrote on December 18, 1864, from Savannah: "We left Atlanta the 15<sup>th</sup> of November after destroying the Rail Road, all Depots and Publick [sic] Buildings ... we arrived here the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month all safe. We destroyed all railroads, cotton and everything that was of any use to the Confederacy and we lived off the country on sweet potatoes, chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, flour and meal and other things. We only drew 18 hard tacks on the march."

Paper appears to have been somewhat scarce during the Civil War as evidenced by the fact that Eaton occasionally wrote his letters on blank space found on the same stationery of letters he had already received from his wife Elisabeth. Her letters, which were written at Fort Ann, contain news about the family and other news about people and events in the community. This offers a glimpse of what life was like back home.

Levi Eaton appears to have kept in touch with his family in Montreal as evidenced by a number of letters he received from his brother, François K. Hétu, who was a teacher in a local school. The letters detail news about the family, his teaching career, and a glimpse of what it was like to live in Montreal at the time.

These papers also include "boat books" for schooners that plied Lake Champlain, ca. 1849-1853, which contain accounts detailing shipping costs for the cargo onboard, wages due for sailors, and costs for boat maintenance and repair. The books were kept by Orrin Landon of Willsboro, Essex County, New York. The blank leaves in the "boat books" were later used by his daughter, Sarah, for compositions and other writings. Sarah Landon also kept diaries from 1858-1863, which detail her activities and experiences. The relationship between the Landon family and the Eaton family has not been determined.

## Inventory of Documents

Box	Folder	Content
1	0	Guide to collection; information from census and military service records; excerpts and transcripts of selected Civil War letters of Levi Eaton
1	1	<p>Letters of Levi Eaton to his wife, 1862-1865. [Levi Eaton served with the 123<sup>rd</sup> New York Infantry during the Civil War.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Camp Chase, September 21, 1862</li> <li>b) Staffords Court House, Va., February 9, 1863</li> <li>c) Staffords Court House, Va., March 10, 1863</li> <li>d) Staffords Court House, Va., March 24, 1863</li> <li>e) Staffords Court House, Va., April 6, 1863</li> <li>f) Staffords Court House, Va., April 25, 1863</li> <li>g) Staffords Court House, Va., June 5, 1863</li> <li>h) Leesburgh, Va., June 24, 1863</li> <li>i) Gettysburg, [Pa.], July 6, 1863</li> <li>j) Kelleys [sic] Ford, August 1, 1863</li> <li>k) Kelleys [sic] Ford, Va., August 7[?], 1863</li> <li>l) Kellys Ford, Va., September 9, 1863</li> <li>m) Near Bridgeport, Ala., November 1, 1863</li> <li>n) Altona Heights, June 1, 1864</li> <li>o) Near Merietta [sic], Ga., July 13, 1864</li> <li>p) 2 miles from Atlanta, [Ga.], July 25, [1864] (on back is a letter from his wife written at Fort Ann, [N.Y.], June 3, [1864])</li> <li>q) On Chattahoochie [sic] River, August 31, 1864 (on back is a letter from his wife written at Fort Ann, [N.Y.], August 16, [1864])</li> <li>r) Atlanta, Georgia, September 4, 1864</li> <li>s) Atlanta, [Ga.], October 25, 1864</li> <li>t) Savannah, [Ga.], December 18, 1864</li> <li>u) Near Savannah, Ga., January 15, [1865]</li> <li>v) Sisters Ferry, S.C., February 3, 1865</li> <li>w) Elk River Bridge, February 9[?], 1865[?]</li> <li>x) Goldsboro, N.C., March 28, 1865</li> <li>y) Raleigh, N.C., April 20, 1865 (fragment)</li> <li>z) Fragments of two letters and a note indicating Levi Eaton's French name was Leon Hètu</li> </ul>
1	2	<p>Letters of [François] K. Hétu to Levi Eaton, 1858-1875 (salutation: To brother and sister)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Montreal, November 8, 1858</li> <li>b) Montreal, May 1, 1861</li> <li>c) Montreal, December 26, 1861</li> <li>d) Montreal, October 10, 1862</li> <li>e) Montreal, September 19, 186[?] (portion of the sheet missing)</li> <li>f) Lachine, [Montreal]. December 9, 1875</li> </ul>
1	3	<p>Miscellaneous letters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Robert H. Peru to aunt, Maryanza, [La.], September 12, 1864 (This letter</li> </ul>

Box	Folder	Content
		discusses the 1864 U.S. presidential election campaign) b) Merthil [?] to brother, Montreal, October 26, 1896 c) Postal cover addressed to Mrs. Levi Eaton at Fort Ann, Washington County, N.Y.; it was postmarked from Montreal, May 20, 1897.
1	4	Diary of Sarah M. Landon, 1858-1861 (94 p.; 20 cm.) – unidentified <i>carte de visite</i> photograph of a woman and child enclosed
1	5	Ledger of debit-credit accounts kept by Orrin Landon, 1849-1855 with diary, 1861-1863 that was kept by Sarah M. Landon (ca. 100 p.; 19 cm.)
1	6	“Schooner <i>Excelsior’s</i> Boat Book. Willsborough, June 19, 1850, kept by Captain Saxton Lyon for O. Landon,” 1850-1852; book also contains some writings of Sarah M. Landon Fox, ca. 1865 (ca. 100 p.; 20 cm.)
1	7	“Schooner <i>Waterwitch’s</i> Book for 1850. Willsborough April 16, 1850-1853, [kept] by Captain John Shelden”; the book also contains some writings of Sarah M. Landon Fox, ca. 1859-1869 (ca. 120 p.; 20 cm.)

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